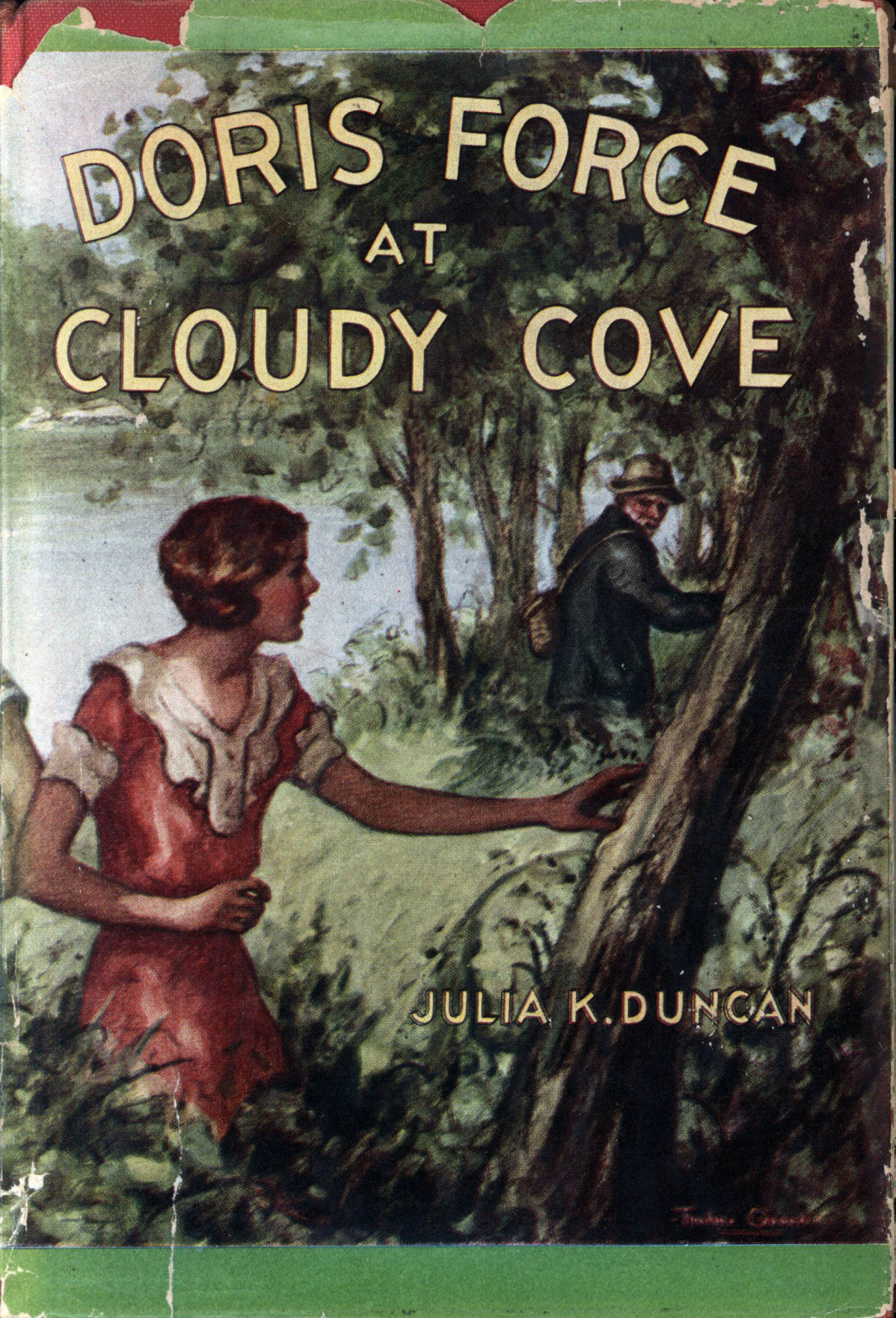
DORIS FORCE
AT
CLOUDY COVE
JULIA K. DUNCAN

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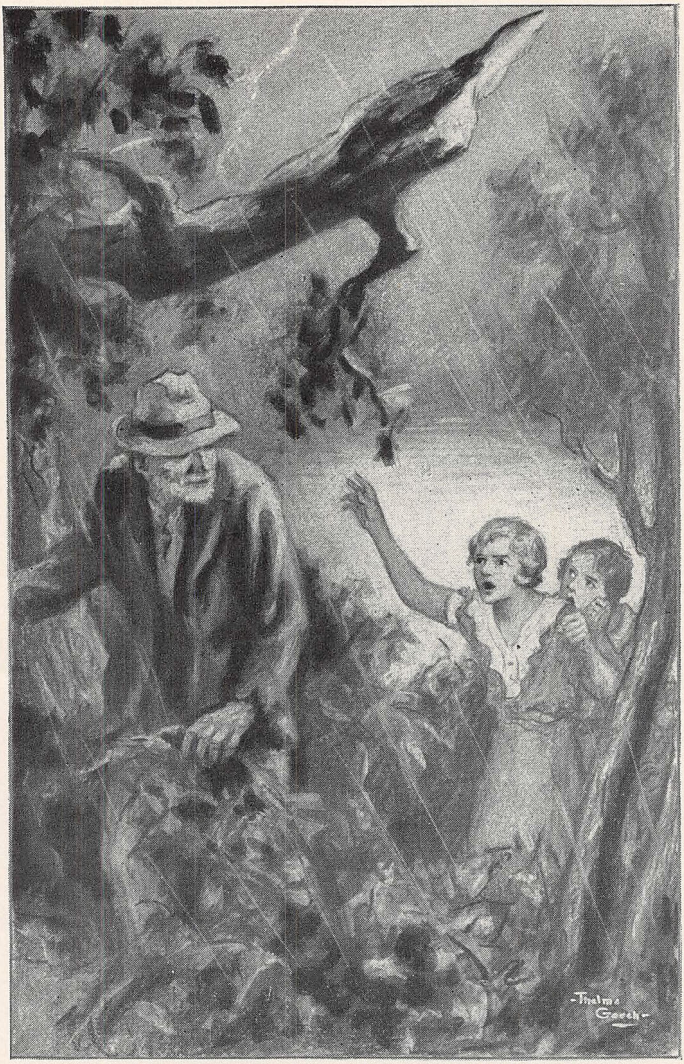

"LOOK OUT!" CRIED DORIS FRANTICALLY

DORIS FORCE AT CLOUDY COVE

Or

The Old Miser's Signature

By

JULIA K. DUNCAN

Illustrated by

THELMA GOOCH

M. A. DONOHUE & COMPANY
CHICAGO NEW YORK

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CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I	A New Automobile	5
II	The Theft	15
III	Off for Cloudy Cove	24
IV	A Chance Acquaintance	32
V	A Pest	39
VI	More about Snakes	45
VII	A Distasteful Introduction	53
VIII	The Miser of Cloudy Cove	60
IX	An Opportunity	70
X	Doris's Debut	78
XI	Fire!	84
XII	Ollie Weiser Again	94
XIII	An Embarrassing Situation	100
XIV	Meeting Mr. Jay	108
XV	A Fishing Trip	115
XVI	A Promise	123
XVII	A Discouraging Day	130
XVIII	Caught in a Storm	138

Chapter		Page
XIX	A Hint of the Past	145
XX	Dave and Marshmallow	152
XXI	A Narrow Escape	162
XXII	Exonerated	173
XXIII	A Glimmer of Light	185
XXIV	The Chase	197
XXV	A Satisfactory Solution	206

DORIS FORCE AT CLOUDY COVE

CHAPTER I

A NEW AUTOMOBILE

DORIS FORCE laid aside the book she had been reading and smiled at her chum, Kitty Norris, who was stretched out comfortably on the davenport.

"Don't you wish something exciting would happen, Kit?" she asked. "Saturday afternoon is always so dull."

Kitty yawned indolently.

"I don't mind a little quiet for a change. It seems to me thrilling things have been happening ever since I came to visit you here at Chilton."

"We did get mixed up in strange adventures at Locked Gates," Doris admitted, carelessly rumpling her curly red bob. "Just think what's still ahead!"

Kitty gazed at her chum rather enviously.

"In another month you may be an honest-to-goodness heiress," she said impressively. "Doris, why *do* you muss up your hair that way? If I had a wave, I wouldn't try to discourage it!"

"If you had mine, you couldn't," Doris laughed.

She had naturally curly hair which fell softly about her face. It was deep red in color, and though she could never take the time to brush it properly, it had lost none of its sheen.

"I can't imagine myself an heiress!" Doris glanced meditatively into the full-length mirror and winked at her own reflection. "There must be a catch somewhere. Do you suppose Uncle John Trent really did leave me his money?"

"How should I know?" Kitty had already answered this question at least a dozen times. "You'll soon find out, when we get to Cloudy Cove."

"I think that's what makes me so restless—I'm impatient to be off. Ever since I learned about the inheritance, I've been dying to find out all the details. Of course, I promised Azalea and Iris Gates I'd settle up the estate."

"By the way, when do we start for Cloudy Cove?" Kitty asked curiously.

"I was talking to Mrs. Mallow this morning about it. She said—" Doris left the sentence unfinished, for just then the front door bell rang.

"Oh, bother!" she exclaimed. "I'll have to run downstairs and answer it. Mrs. Mallow has gone away for the day."

Leaving the suite, she rushed down to the front door and opened it. A tall, dark skinned man removed his hat and bowed.

"Is Mr. Mallow in?"

"Mr. Mallow? Oh, you mean Marshall! No, he went downtown about an hour ago. I think he said he intended to stop at Smith's Garage. Is there a message you wish me to give him?"

The stranger smiled blandly.

"Thank you, no. I'll call later."

"Do you wish to leave your card?"

"I don't believe I have one with me. Never mind the name. I may see him at the garage."

With that the stranger turned away and walked rapidly down the street. Doris did not close the door immediately, but stood watching the man until he disappeared around the corner. Though she scarcely understood her own feelings, she knew that for some reason she did not like the man.

"I wonder why he's so eager to see Marshmallow?" she asked herself. "He looks like a salesman, and yet if he were one, I don't see why he would be unwilling to leave his name."

Returning to Kitty, she told her of the stranger's queer manner, and described him.

"He's quite too slick looking to suit me," she declared with a troubled frown. "I saw him here this morning talking with Jake in the garden. I suppose he was looking for Marshmallow then."

"Wonder what business he can have with Marshall?" Kitty murmured. "I wish I'd seen him."

After they had exhausted the subject, the girls

fell to talking of their proposed trip to Cloudy Cove. Since Doris had learned that her uncle, the late John Trent, had left a sum of money in a bank in that city, she had been eager to make the journey. Cloudy Cove was a pleasant summer resort city, but since it was located some four hundred miles from Chilton, she had not been able to go there as soon as she had wished to.

Her uncle, Wardell Force, with whom she had made her home since the death of her own parents, was frequently called away from Chilton to manage charity campaigns, and this summer, being more busy than usual, he had found it impossible to accompany Doris. However, he had realized the importance of the trip and so had arranged that Mrs. Mallow take the two girls. They planned to spend two weeks at "Mayfair," one of the summer hotels. There had been some delay in making reservations, and it had been necessary to write to Kitty's parents. They had promptly agreed that she might make the trip with her chum. When the affair took on the aspect of a vacation jaunt, Marshmallow and Dave Chamberlin, another friend, announced that they, too, wished to be included in the plans.

At first it had appeared that they must remain at home, for neither of the boys felt he could spare the money necessary for carfare. Undaunted, they determined to make the trip in Dave's roadster.

As luck would have it, a few days before the time set for the start it suddenly developed a case of engine trouble. Since Marshmallow's car had long been known as the junkiest one in Chilton, prospects of reaching Cloudy Cove were very gloomy indeed.

Then Mrs. Mallow, taking pity on her son, had promised him, that if he could make a good trade for a new car, she would advance the necessary money. Highly elated, Marshmallow and Dave were searching the town for a "bargain."

"I do hope they find something today," Doris sighed, "and I think perhaps they will. Mrs. Mallow told me this morning that they had heard of a man who is willing to sell a sedan at a give-away price."

"There must be something the matter with the car," Kitty said suspiciously.

"Dave and Marshmallow will find that out before they buy it. Trust them not to get cheated. They're both marvels when it comes to automobile engines!"

"I hope Marshall does buy the sedan," Kitty declared. "It will be so much more fun, if we can all drive to Cloudy Cove together."

After a time, as the conversation languished, the girls returned to their reading. The tiny clock on the mantel chimed five. Suddenly the girls were startled to hear the loud honking of an automobile

horn at the front of the house. Together they rushed to the window.

"It's Dave and Marshmallow!" Doris exclaimed.

"And just look at that car!" Kitty squealed in delight. "Isn't it a beauty? Marshmallow must have bought it!"

Dropping their books, they rushed downstairs and out of the front door. Dave and Marshmallow were just stepping from the sedan as the girls hurried up.

"Well, how do you like it?" Marshmallow demanded proudly.

"Oh, it's wonderful!" Kitty exclaimed, casting an admiring eye over the upholstery. "You haven't really bought it, have you?"

"Of course I have," the plump lad affirmed.

"It looks so—so expensive," Doris ventured doubtfully.

"Believe me, it's a real bargain," Marshmallow informed her. "He will take my old car and I gave him only one hundred dollars to boot. The man wouldn't have given it to us at that price except for cash."

"Aren't you afraid there may be something the matter with it?" Doris suggested.

Marshmallow smiled, a trifle condescendingly.

"Isn't that just like a girl? There isn't a thing the matter with this car. She's perfect. Dave and I have gone over her with a fine-tooth comb."

Doris and Kitty stepped into the sedan and eased themselves into the soft cushions. They tried the gears and examined the various instruments on the dashboard.

"I don't know much about automobiles," Doris admitted, "but this looks too good for that price."

"It was a fair enough bargain," Marshmallow chuckled.

"Did your mother see the car?"

"No, but she gave me the money and told me to go ahead. She trusts my judgment when it comes to cars."

Doris could not help but smile as Marshmallow took out his handkerchief and brushed an imaginary speck of dust from the windshield.

"There isn't much room behind the wheel," she said mischievously. "Are you sure you'll be able to squeeze in, Marsh?"

Marshmallow ignored the gibe and turned toward his friend.

"Come on in the house, Dave. I want you to help me make out those papers the owner gave me."

"Oh, don't go in," Doris pleaded. "Take us for a little ride."

"Haven't time now," Marshmallow muttered, though he saw that Dave was expecting him to accept.

"Oh, you're trying to punish me for intimating

you were fat," Doris wailed. "I'll take it all back —every word! Please take us for a ride—just a teeny, weeny one."

"Maybe tomorrow," Marshmallow promised grandly. "Come on, Dave."

With a regretful glance over his shoulder, Dave followed his friend into the house, leaving the girls in possession of the sedan.

"Now isn't that just too mean!" Doris exclaimed in disappointment.

"I don't think he meant to be mean," Kitty ventured, for she was rather partial to the plump lad.

"I guess I deserved it, but just the same I don't like to be cheated out of our ride. I know! Let's take the car out ourselves!"

"Oh, we wouldn't dare. I can't run a car!"

"Well, I can, though not so very skillfully, I'll admit. We won't go far. Just around the park a few times. Won't Marshmallow just burn up? It will serve him right. He's so excited about the grand buy he made."

"All right," Kitty agreed, warming to the adventure. "See if you can start the engine."

After a little search Doris located the various switches and, after two unsuccessful attempts, succeeded in starting the engine. She thrust in the clutch and switched into low gear.

"Toot the horn!" she directed.

As Kitty played a staccato tune upon the horn

button, she let out the clutch so quickly that the car leaped forward like a playful panther. The girls waved goodbye, as Marshmallow and Dave rushed out on the porch.

"Next time Marshmallow won't be so uppish about his car," Doris laughed.

She drove slowly, for she was not familiar with the car and she intended to run no risk of damaging it. Thinking that there would be less traffic on the open road, she selected a street which led to the outskirts of the city. The engine ran so smoothly and quietly that before she realized it the speedometer registered thirty miles an hour.

"Not too fast," Kitty warned. "If anything should go wrong, Marshmallow never would forgive us."

The girls had been so engrossed in the road ahead that they did not notice a high-powered car which was rapidly approaching from the rear. They did not realize that they were being followed, until a shrill, long-drawn-out whistle pierced their ears.

"The State Police!" Kitty gasped.

"They can't want us! We're not speeding!"

Even as she spoke the police car flashed ahead of them and blocked the road.

"Halt!" came the sharp command.

Doris slammed on the brakes and brought the sedan to a standstill alongside the police car.

"Surely there must be some mistake," she murmured, uneasily noticing that one of the officers held a revolver in his hand.

"There's no mistake, young lady," she was informed coldly. "We've been looking for this stolen car for the last week!"

CHAPTER II

THE THEFT

"STOLEN car!" Kitty and Doris gasped.

"Yes," the officer returned, opening the door of the sedan. "It won't do you any good to pretend you don't know what it's all about, because we've got the goods on you. Tumble out before we have to use force!"

Kitty hastily stepped from the car, but Doris, who had begun to grasp the seriousness of the situation, did not move. She was determined not to abandon Marshmallow's new automobile without a struggle.

"Really," she said earnestly to the officer, "you're making a dreadful mistake in trying to arrest us. This car belongs to a friend of ours. He bought it only this afternoon and my chum and I thought we would go for a little ride."

"What's your name?" the officer demanded bluntly.

"Doris Force."

"Force, eh? Not the niece of Wardell Force?"

"Yes, he's my uncle," Doris declared eagerly.

"And who do you claim owns this car?"

"Marshall Mallow."

Doris told a straightforward story and spoke in such an earnest manner that the officers were impressed. After a brief conference, the spokesman turned again to the frightened girls.

"If what you say is true, we'll get this fellow Mallow and let you off. If your story doesn't prove up, you'll get a chance to talk to the judge. Now lead the way to where this Mallow lives!"

"Marshall didn't steal the car," Doris insisted indignantly. "He owns it."

The officer laughed shortly.

"This sedan was stolen last week from a wealthy lawyer who lives in Bainbridge."

He seated himself beside Doris and ordered Kitty to get into the back. He then told Doris to start the car. Nervously she obeyed, but as she let in the clutch the sedan leaped forward with a jerk. The officer looked sharply at her and said sternly:

"None of your tricks, young lady!"

"I tell you I never had my hand on this wheel until this afternoon!" Doris insisted somewhat impatiently, for she was driving as well as she possibly could.

As she guided the sedan down the side streets of Chilton, she was painfully conscious that the police car was following close behind. What would her friends think if they saw her with such an escort? How could she bear to face Marshmallow? She

blamed herself for taking the car in the first place. She had only herself to thank for the unpleasant situation.

Doris was supersensitive to public opinion, for though Chilton was a city of average size, she had lived there many years and was known by nearly everybody. Since the death of her parents she had made her home with Wardell Force, her uncle, who occupied a pleasant suite of rooms in the Mallow residence. Mr. Force, retired from active business, was absorbed in charity work and at the present time was engaged in a gigantic campaign to raise money for a fresh-air fund. Doris realized only too well that if her name crept into the newspapers in connection with the stolen car, the resulting publicity would make her uncle's work more difficult.

She could not believe that Marshmallow or Dave knew they had purchased a stolen automobile, for both young men enjoyed excellent reputations in the community. Dave, an ardent admirer of Doris, was serious-minded and studious. At the aviation school where he was enrolled he was considered one of the most promising young aviators. Marshmallow, the only son of his widowed mother, Mrs. Mallow, was easy-going and full of fun. His greatest interest in life was his appetite.

Marshmallow and Doris had grown up together and were inclined to engage in good-natured arguments now and then. However, they were the

best of friends, and Marshmallow had been as pleased as anyone, when Doris learned that a visit to Locked Gates offered the prospect of a fortune.

As is recounted in the first volume of this series, "Doris Force at Locked Gates," she had gone to the mysterious mansion of the Misses Gates to claim her fortune. Instead of receiving an inheritance, she found herself involved in an intricate plot. With the aid of Jake, a man employed by her uncle, Doris uncovered the fact that a notorious criminal, Joe Jeffery, was attempting to swindle the Misses Gates. Not only did she expose this plan, but she learned that her long-lost uncle, John Trent, had actually left a sum of money in a bank at Cloudy Cove. At the request of the Misses Gates she had promised to settle up the estate, and, if possible, solve the mystery which surrounded her Uncle John Trent's strange disappearance from home many years before.

As she stopped the sedan in front of the Mallow residence, Doris was thinking that the unfortunate accusation of the police might postpone her trip to Cloudy Cove. She was relieved to see Marshmallow and Dave in the front yard. The two young men hurried over to the curb, but stopped short as they saw the police.

"Ha! Pinched for speeding!" Marshmallow jested.

The grin faded from his face as he saw the sober

countenances of the girls and the stern expressions of the officers.

"Are you Mallow?" he was questioned.

Rather uneasily, Marshmallow admitted that he was.

"You own this sedan?"

"I do," Marshmallow returned proudly. "Bought her today."

"Where is your bill-of-sale?"

Dave and Marshmallow exchanged quick glances.

"Why, we haven't any," Marshmallow admitted sheepishly. "We thought the fellow gave it to us, but when we went to look in the envelope, it wasn't there."

"So! Well, young fellow, if you haven't a bill-of-sale, I guess you'll just have to march along to jail with us!"

"What for? I haven't done anything."

"You're in the possession of stolen property!"

"Look here!" Marshmallow protested heatedly. "There's something wrong. I bought this car fair and square from a fellow by the name of Dunn—K. R. were his initials."

"That's true," Dave added. "He's a tall, dark fellow. A stranger in town. Marshmallow planned to trade in his old car."

"Why, that must have been the man who came here and asked for Marshmallow early this afternoon!" Doris exclaimed.

"Sure," Marshall agreed. "He said he stopped at the house. Say, if that bird sold me a stolen car! Just wait till I get hold of him!"

"He's probably skipped town by this time," one of the officers said. "Your story sounds straight enough, so I guess you were just taken in."

"Then we won't have to go to jail?" Kitty demanded.

"No, not unless we catch this fellow Dunn and need you to identify him."

"What about my car?" Marshmallow asked miserably.

"I'm afraid you're out of luck there. We'll have to return it to its rightful owner. Next time be more wary of a slick salesman!"

Kitty and Doris reluctantly stepped out of the sedan and watched as one of the officers drove it away. Marshmallow leaned dejectedly on the gate.

"Oh, Marsh, it was all my fault," Doris murmured contritely. "I didn't mean—"

"It wasn't your fault, Dory. The police would have been after me sooner or later. I might have known that car was too good a bargain!"

There was little that the others could say to comfort him, for they, too, were discouraged by the turn events had taken. The loss of the sedan undoubtedly meant that the boys would be unable to make the trip to Cloudy Cove.

"I haven't the nerve to ask Mother for more money," Marshmallow declared, as he sank down on the porch steps and gazed gloomily out toward the street. "Do you think there's any chance they'll catch that fellow?"

"I'm afraid not," Dave told him. "He's probably in another state by this time."

"If only I'd given him a check instead of cash," Marshmallow moaned. "Then I could have stopped payment."

"I guess this queers our trip," Dave said thoughtfully. "My car won't be in shape for weeks."

"Why not take your car?" Doris suggested halfheartedly to Marshmallow.

"You know Mother wouldn't set foot in it," the stout lad protested. "It's so tough looking I'm almost ashamed of it myself."

"Perhaps Kitty and I could go with Mrs. Mallow on the train, as we originally planned. You and Dave could start ahead. Why not paint your car up? That would improve its appearance a lot."

Marshmallow brightened instantly.

"Say, that's an idea! What do you say, Dave?"

"It's our only chance of getting to Cloudy Cove. Maybe if we tinker with the engine a bit and splash on a couple of coats of paint, we can make something out of that old bus!"

Inspired by Doris's suggestion, the two young

men hurried to the nearest store to purchase paint. Returning, they backed Marshmallow's car out into the yard and set to work.

Doris and Kitty, who in the meantime had decided that by washing out a number of frocks they would speed up preparations for their trip, had come out on the back porch. By the time they had wrung out the garments and hung them upon the line, Marshmallow and Dave had washed the car and were ready to start painting.

"Want us to help?" Kitty asked.

"Too many artists might ruin the job," Marshmallow laughed.

The girls were not offended that their services were not in demand, for they preferred to watch from the porch steps and to offer suggestions and criticisms. Wags, a small brown dog which Doris had found along the roadside several weeks before, frisked about the automobile and annoyed the boys by biting at their heels. Twice Dave saved the paint bucket from being upset.

"I wish you'd take that little scamp in the house and lock him up!" Marshmallow declared impatiently. "He gets his paws all paint and then he tries to put them on me!"

Wags was reluctant to leave the scene, but the girls dragged him inside by force. Doris went to the piano to practice her singing lesson and Kitty settled herself in a big chair to finish her book.

The dog was completely forgotten. Unnoticed, he went out into the kitchen, and gently pushing open the screen door with his nose, slipped outside.

Fifteen minutes later Doris noticed that he was missing and arose from the piano bench to see what had become of him. At that very moment a loud shout came from the back yard, to be followed by a series of delighted canine yelps. Doris rushed to the window.

"Kitty!" she cried in dismay. "Just see what Wags has done now! Oh, he's ruined everything!"

CHAPTER III

OFF FOR CLOUDY COVE

HEARING Doris's exclamation, Kitty ran to the window. There was no need to ask what had happened for she saw at a glance the havoc Wags had wrought. In his playful attempts to "chase" the flapping garments, which were drying on the clothes-line, he had pushed down the supporting pole, with the result that the line was permitted to drop across one side of Marshmallow's freshly-painted car.

"Oh, all of our dresses are ruined!" Doris wailed.

Rushing out into the back yard the two girls snatched their frocks from the line and anxiously examined them for paint marks. Marshmallow and Dave gave chase to Wags, but the wary little dog, realizing that he had made a fatal error of judgment in attacking the clothes-line, raced across the street out of danger's way.

"I thought you were going to keep that dog in the house," Marshmallow grumbled, as the boys came back to the car. "Goodnight! Just look at that! We'll have to paint the whole side over again! And it's almost dark now."

"Just look at our frocks!" Doris retorted. "We'll be lucky if we ever get the spots out."

While the four were taking stock of the damage Wags had caused, Mrs. Mallow came to the kitchen door to announce that supper was ready. When Dave turned to leave, she called him back, insisting that he remain.

Marshmallow already had broken the news of the stolen automobile to his mother and was relieved to find that she had not considered him at all to blame for the turn events had taken. In fact, Mrs. Mallow had learned from sad experience that her son's business ventures frequently were impetuous, and had schooled herself to accept them philosophically.

On this evening she did not permit the loss of the money to dampen the spirits of the young people, and as usual supper was a very gay affair. Wardell Force, who was always at his best when surrounded by a group of girls and boys, even made a joke of the misfortune, and by the time the salad was served the unpleasant details were forgotten. Mrs. Mallow was an excellent cook and on this night she had quite outdone herself. As Marshmallow passed his plate for a third helping, Doris teasingly observed that his recent troubles did not appear to affect his appetite.

Naturally the conversation centered about the proposed trip to Cloudy Cove. Dave and Marsh-

mallow insisted that they would have the automobile in shape for the journey within two days, and since the others were eager to be off, it was definitely decided that they leave Chilton on Tuesday. Dave and Marshmallow planned to drive the car, leaving early in the morning, while Mrs. Mallow and the girls would take the late night train.

"Too bad you're not going too, Uncle Ward," Doris remarked. "Can't you possibly come with us?"

"I'm afraid not," her uncle returned with a regretful smile. "While you're enjoying yourselves at Cloudy Cove, I must deliver an important lecture in the southern part of the state."

"Oh, we don't expect to play all the time we're gone," Doris laughed. "I may surprise you and come back with a fortune!"

The following day Marshmallow and Dave worked diligently on the old car, yet found time to make a trip to the police station. To their disappointment they were informed that Mr. Dunn had not been apprehended.

"I guess it's goodbye to the hundred bucks," Marshmallow groaned.

With Mrs. Mallow's assistance Doris and Kitty re-washed the stained frocks and packed their suitcases. Doris was hard-pressed to find time to get everything accomplished, for she was scheduled to

take a singing lesson from Herr Von Heflinger, recognized as the best teacher in the city. She had studied music for many years and had a pleasing soprano voice, which had won her considerable local fame. Herr Von Heflinger was proud of his pupil and encouraged her to try for a career. Indeed, Doris had determined that some day she would reach Grand Opera, but for the present her ambitions were checked by insufficient funds. If only her Uncle John Trent *had* left her his estate! How much it would mean!

The Monday morning mail brought Doris a letter from Azalea and Iris Gates.

"We are enclosing an old photograph which we thought perhaps might be useful to you," they wrote, "but trust that you will have no difficulty in establishing your identity or in settling up the estate."

Doris studied the picture with interest. It was old and faded, and the poses of the Misses Gates and her Uncle John Trent were rather artificial, for the photograph had been taken many years before.

"My uncle was quite dashing at that," Doris remarked, as she showed the picture to Kitty. "How lovely the twins were, when they were young! No wonder he couldn't decide which one he wanted to marry."

Turning the photograph over, she noticed a signature on the back. Her uncle had written "De-

votedly," and had signed his name. Doris studied the handwriting critically, admiring the bold scrawl.

"I'll take this photograph with me," she told her chum as she slipped it into her handbag. "It may be useful."

"How about the ruby ring?" Kitty questioned.

She referred to the jewel which the Misses Gates had bestowed upon Doris as a reward for saving their fortune. During the girls' recent stay at Locked Gates, Wags had unearthed a tiny box containing the beautiful ring. A card inside indicated that John Trent had intended it as a gift to either Azalea or Iris, but since he had failed to state which one he had favored, neither would accept it.

"I may as well wear it," Doris responded. "It's such a valuable ring I'm afraid to leave it here in the house."

Early Tuesday morning Dave and Marshmallow piled their luggage into the newly-painted car and prepared to depart for Cloudy Cove. At the last minute Mrs. Mallow and the girls decided to postpone their trip until the following day, for Wardell Force had been unable to secure satisfactory accommodations on the night train.

"We'll see you in Cloudy Cove Thursday morning," Mrs. Mallow declared, as she said goodbye to the young men. "Don't forget the name of our hotel."

"Where did you say you were going to stay?"

"Oh, Marshmallow," Doris answered, "anyone would think you had not heard us talking and talking about the Mayfair."

Kitty giggled.

"Don't you dare forget the name of the hotel or of Cloudy Cove, either!" she commanded.

"We'll be there, all right," Marshmallow assured her.

After the car had rattled away, Doris and Kitty attended to the last-minute details of their packing. In spite of the work which had to be done, the day seemed to drag.

"I just feel it in my bones that something exciting will happen to us at Cloudy Cove!" Doris observed to her chum. "Oh, I can hardly wait until we start!"

The girls were awake at six o'clock the next morning, and though there was no need of arising so early, they soon awakened the household. Breakfast was quickly eaten and then, as it approached train time, the luggage was loaded into Mr. Force's sedan.

Jake left his work in the garden to say goodbye to the girls.

"If you need my help again, just drop me a line," he grinned at Doris.

Arriving at the station shortly before eleven o'clock, the girls found they would not have long to

wait. Soon they heard a long-drawn-out whistle and a moment later they saw the train rounding the bend.

"Take good care of yourself," Wardell Force warned, as he hastily kissed his niece goodbye, "and don't forget to write."

"You're the one who forgets," Doris laughed.

She was the last passenger to step aboard the train, and from the vestibule waved to her uncle until he was out of sight. Then she made her way back to the Pullman car where Mrs. Mallow and Kitty already had established themselves.

"Why so sober?" Kitty demanded lightly as her chum sat down beside her. "Not homesick already, I hope?"

Doris shook her head and smiled.

"Just thinking," she returned.

It would have been difficult for her to have expressed her thoughts. She was wondering what awaited her at Cloudy Cove. To her friends the trip meant a pleasant summer excursion, but for her it had a vital significance. Though her Uncle Ward had been far too tactful to remind her of the depleted state of her finances, she realized that what little money she possessed was fast melting away. True, she had received a thousand dollars in reward for aiding in the capture of Joe Jeffery, but the trip to Cloudy Cove would take a portion of it and, when she returned home, there were

many expenses to be met. Her schooling at Barry Manor cost a great deal and music lessons were very expensive.

"What a relief it would be to Uncle Ward if I should be remembered in John Trent's will," she thought. "After all, I am his next of kin. But then, I mustn't build up my hopes! In a few days I'll know just how the matter stands."

CHAPTER IV

A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE

As soon as the baggage had been adjusted to her satisfaction, Mrs. Mallow brought out a magazine and began to read. Doris and Kitty were more interested in their fellow passengers and studied them intently. In particular their attention was attracted to an elderly, white-haired gentleman who occupied the section directly opposite them. Several times he smiled, but it was not until after the conductor had gone through the car collecting tickets that he ventured to speak to them.

"Did I hear you young ladies say you were going to Cloudy Cove?" he inquired in a curious but friendly manner. "I hail from there myself."

"You do?" Doris questioned eagerly. "Then perhaps you can tell us all about the place."

"Reckon I can. I've lived in Cloudy Cove ever since 1890—or was it 1892? Well, never mind the date. I guess it's slipped my mind."

Mrs. Mallow glanced up sharply to see who it was that had brushed up an acquaintance with the girls but, reassured, returned to her reading. Doris and Kitty, eager to learn more about Cloudy Cove, moved over into the opposite seat.

"Reckon you're going to Cloudy Cove on your vacation," the stranger commented, reaching in his pocket and bringing out a card. "I own a number of cottages on the shore and if you're looking for a place to stay, you might care to look them over. Here's my card."

He extended it to Doris, who glanced with interest at the name: Silas Baker.

"We've already engaged rooms at the hotel," she informed him. "We're really not on a vacation trip at all. I have business to attend to at the National Bank there."

"You don't say!" the old man observed. "Why, I used to work in that bank when I was a boy."

"Then you must know nearly everyone in Cloudy Cove!" Doris cried eagerly.

"I reckon I did at one time, but the town has grown and I don't remember faces the way I once did. Bless me, I haven't even told you my name." He fumbled in his pocket for another card.

Doris and Kitty found it difficult to refrain from laughing. Silas Baker was indeed a forgetful old man, but obviously very kindly and goodhearted.

"Tell me," Doris began hopefully, "do you remember a man by the name of Trent? John Trent?"

The old man gazed thoughtfully out of the window toward the fields which were flashing past.

"Seems to me I've heard the name," he said at last, "but I can't just place it."

"Perhaps Mr. John Trent went away from Cloudy Cove?" Doris tried to help the faulty memory of the white-haired passenger.

"Let me see," the elderly man answered. "It seems to come back to me that Mr. Trent—"

Mr. Baker's voice trailed off into an unfinished sentence. Doris hardly knew whether or not to keep on prodding the forgetful man for information. With her the subject of her uncle was a vital one, but she reminded herself that after all this kindly old man was a total stranger to her.

She looked at Kitty, to determine what her chum might be thinking. That young lady bobbed her head in approval, and without uttering a sound made her lips say:

"Go on and ask him some more."

Thus urged, Doris tried once more.

"He didn't have an account at your bank?" she ventured.

"Let me see. Trent. John Trent." Silas Baker repeated the name slowly. "Why yes, seems to me he did have an account with us at one time. Or was it that he rented a safe deposit box? Bless me, it's been too long ago for me to recall."

Doris cast her chum a half-despairing glance. If only the old gentleman could remember! It was tantalizing to realize that, had his memory

been unimpaired, he might have been able to furnish her with valuable information concerning her long-lost uncle.

Hopefully she plied him with questions, yet of the past Mr. Baker could remember but little. After the girls had talked with him for perhaps half an hour and were satisfied that they had learned all that he could tell them of Cloudy Cove, they took their leave and walked back to the observation car.

Entering, they were surprised to see that some form of impromptu entertainment was going on. A group of passengers had gathered about a sallow-faced, sleek young man who was causing a deck of cards to perform in a most astonishing manner. Doris and Kitty crowded forward to watch the exhibition of magic.

"He's a professional," Kitty whispered to her chum. "You can tell that by the way he handles the cards."

The magician had seen the two girls enter the car and smiled at them in a rather personal way. Slightly confused, as the other passengers turned to stare at them, Kitty and Doris would have backed out of the room had not the performer called to them.

"Don't go away, girlies. The great Ollie Weiser is about to perform a breath-taking stunt. Now, ladies and gentlemen, watch very closely! I place

my handkerchief over the palm of my hand thus—"

In spite of the unrefined manner in which the man had singled them out, Kitty and Doris found it impossible to turn away. Overpowered with curiosity, they crowded forward with the other passengers.

"Watch my every move," the magician challenged. "And presto! What have we?" He swept the handkerchief from his hand.

A cry of horror went up from the ladies and even the men backed hastily away. There, coiled about the magician's hand, was a small snake!

"Ugh!" Kitty murmured. "He must have had it up his sleeve! You couldn't hire me to touch the crawly thing!"

"Show's over," the magician announced. "This is only a small sample of what I can do. I've three other snakes here in this suitcase and they're all trained."

"Better not let the conductor see them or they'll land in the baggage car," one of the passengers suggested bluntly.

Doris and Kitty took seats near the door, and selecting magazines from the table, began to read. However, scarcely had they sat down when Ollie Weiser slid into the vacant chair beside Doris. She looked askance at the suitcase which she knew contained the snakes, but said nothing.

"Going far?" the magician asked breezily.

Doris glanced up from her magazine rather coldly, and hoping to discourage any attempt at conversation, said briefly:

"To Cloudy Cove."

"Same here. I've been on the road for better'n six years now. Hit all of these jerk-water towns. Lately I've been at liberty, but I'm expecting to get an engagement at Cloudy Cove. You want to be sure to see my act while you're there. It's great! Took me two years to train my snakes."

"Really!" Doris returned with increasing coldness. "I'm not in the least interested in snakes."

She opened her magazine and pretended to read. Not in the least rebuffed, Ollie Weiser turned his attention to Kitty. Since she did not reply to his questions, the conversation turned into a monologue.

Finally, the actor did take the hint and became silent. However, he continued to glance with interest at the girls, and they were made painfully aware of his attention.

"I think we'd better be going back to our car," Doris suggested.

"Yes," Kitty agreed in relief. "Mrs. Mallow will be wondering what has happened to us."

"Don't let me drive you away," Ollie Weiser said with a grin.

Thoroughly provoked at the man's bold manner,

the girls did not trouble themselves to reply. Kitty hastily arose and Doris was just getting to her feet, when her eye noticed the arm of her chair.

There, not six inches from her hand, lay one of the magician's snakes!

CHAPTER V

A PEST

At sight of the snake, Doris instinctively recoiled and gave a little scream of terror. She tried to arise, but fright held her chained.

"Don't move!" the magician warned tersely. "I'll get him!"

He reached over and gently removed the snake from the arm of the chair, murmuring soothingly, "Figi, don't you know you shouldn't annoy the young lady?"

Still trembling, Doris sprang to her feet. She scarcely knew whether to be grateful to the magician for saving her or angry that he had permitted the snake to escape. As she groped for words, several of the passengers began to protest to Ollie Weiser.

"Keep those snakes locked up," one man warned him, "or we'll report you to the conductor."

"It wasn't my fault," the magician protested. "Figi is a smart snake. He got out of the suitcase."

Doris and Kitty did not wait to hear the end of the argument but fled to their own car.

"What an experience!" Doris shuddered.

"Probably the snake was harmless, but my flesh is still creepy from the thought of having that creature near me."

"You know, I think perhaps that magician let the snake out on purpose," Kitty declared.

"You do? If I thought that—"

"He wanted to brush up an acquaintance with us and we didn't pay much attention to him. Probably he thought that trick would make you grateful to him."

"I didn't even thank him. I was so provoked I just couldn't!"

"I don't blame you a bit. Let's not have a thing to do with him. Maybe we won't see him again."

"He's going to Cloudy Cove," Doris reminded her.

"Yes, worse luck, but we need not have anything to do with him."

Mrs. Mallow was quite displeased when the girls told her what had happened. She felt that Ollie Weiser was not entirely blameless, and was relieved that the girls had decided to pay no attention to him.

However, Doris and Kitty had not realized the aggressiveness of their new acquaintance. Scarcely had they picked up their magazines when the magician came through the car, carrying his suitcases. The girls did not glance up, hoping

that he would pass them by. Instead, he swung the case containing the snakes under a seat directly behind them and then bowed with a pleased smile.

"Ah, I see we are to be neighbors."

Mrs. Mallow looked up sharply.

"Young man," she said somewhat sternly, "if you have snakes in that suitcase, I feel it my duty to report you to the conductor. I can't bear the thought of—"

She broke off abruptly, as she caught sight of the conductor coming down the aisle, for in spite of her threat she hesitated to report the young man. However, the railroad official already had been informed of the situation and bore angrily down upon the magician.

"I hear you're carrying a menagerie! There's a strict rule against bringing animals in the cars, you know. You'll have to open up the suitcase."

Ollie Weiser looked the picture of innocence, as he reached down to drag forth one of the bags. It seemed to the girls that he took a long time at it, but presently he slapped the suitcase down upon the seat.

"Someone must have given you the wrong dope," he remarked easily, "but take a look for yourself and then maybe you'll be satisfied."

The conductor somewhat nervously unfastened the straps and threw back the cover. The suit-

case was empty! Ollie Weiser smiled triumphantly and winked at Doris and Kitty.

"There, you see!" he said.

"I'm very sorry, sir," the conductor apologized. "I only took the word of one of the passengers. It's my duty to investigate."

"Sure, that's all right. No hard feelings."

After the conductor had left the car, Doris, who was watching closely, saw the magician slip three snakes from his coat pocket back into the suitcase. In spite of the feeling of distaste which she felt for the man, she could not help but smile.

Ollie Weiser turned to Mrs. Mallow and said gravely:

"The snakes are quite harmless, Madam, but I assure you they will be kept securely locked up. You'll not report me, will you?"

The stern lines of Mrs. Mallow's face relaxed.

"I'm afraid it would do no good," she replied with a faint smile. "However, I trust you will keep your promise. Come, girls, we must go to the diner, or we'll miss our luncheon. I heard the second call some time ago."

Without another glance at the magician she arose and walked toward the front of the train, Kitty and Doris following her. As they took seats in the diner, they saw Mr. Baker at a table at the far end of the car. He bowed in recognition and the three returned the greeting.

"He's a nice looking old man, isn't he?" whispered Doris. "And nice to talk with, too."

"Maybe," offered Kitty. "Certainly two different kinds of people we've talked with on the train. One can't remember anything, and the other wants to tell you everything."

"I can't say I like that magician," Mrs. Mallow commented, as she gave the waiter her order. "I consider him entirely too presumptuous and impertinent."

"I think he means all right, but it's just his bold way," Doris returned with a smile. "However, I don't like him myself."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," Mrs. Mallow observed, obviously relieved. "I wanted to warn you girls about talking too much with him."

"He does all the talking," Kitty interposed. "We just listen."

"I hope you don't consider me dictatorial," Mrs. Mallow said apologetically. "I mean only to be helpful." She lowered her voice. "You see, we're on a mysterious errand and so must be a trifle wary of strangers."

Doris nodded soberly.

"I understand. Kitty and I haven't mentioned our business to anyone. We did ask Mr. Baker a few questions but took care not to tell him why we are going to Cloudy Cove."

"Until everything is settled, we can't be too

careful, Doris. I knew I could trust you to be discreet."

The waiter appeared with a tray of steaming food, and conversation ceased. Yet Ollie Weiser was not to be dismissed lightly, for, as Mrs. Mallow and the girls soon learned, his ways were most aggressive.

CHAPTER VI

MORE ABOUT SNAKES

OLLIE WEISER did not allow himself the luxury of luncheon in the diner. When Mrs. Mallow and the girls returned to their own car, they observed that he had spread out a meal of sandwiches and fruit which he had brought with him. He merely glanced up as they passed, and the three were hopeful that he would no longer annoy them with his attentions.

To pass away the time Mrs. Mallow brought out a deck of cards, but scarcely had the three started their game, when the magician, having cleared away his lunch, arose and sauntered over to their section.

"Need a fourth?" he inquired, and then, before Mrs. Mallow could reply, he sat down. "I'll show you a few tricks."

The three travelers were amazed at the speed with which the magician shuffled the deck. His long, thin fingers were exceedingly deft. Under his manipulation the cards behaved in an uncanny fashion, disappearing and reappearing in strange places.

Though Ollie Weiser was much too bold and sure

of himself, he was a master hand at entertainment, and before many minutes had elapsed, Mrs. Mallow was smiling. If he had been wise, he would have ended his demonstration while that lady was more favorably disposed toward him, but instead he launched into a lengthy tale of his varied stage experiences. After an hour of it Mrs. Mallow took the girls and went back to the observation car, leaving the magician in possession of the section.

"What a pest that man is!" she exclaimed. "I do hope we lose him when we change at the junction."

When the three ventured to return to their car later in the afternoon, they were relieved to find Ollie Weiser gone. Perhaps he realized that he had been snubbed; for, when he reappeared near dinner time, he did not press his attentions upon them.

That evening in the diner Mrs. Mallow and the girls were seated, quite by chance, at a table occupied by Silas Baker. He made himself very agreeable and told them a great deal concerning the history and development of Cloudy Cove. The girls learned that it was a delightful summer resort town, situated some two miles from the Bay of Thor.

"You will find it very pleasant there at this season of the year," the old gentleman assured them. "Late in the fall the district is subject to violent

storms and thick fogs. I suppose that's why they gave it the name of Cloudy Cove."

During the course of the conversation Mr. Baker repeated a great deal of what he had told the girls earlier in the day. However, realizing that he was forgetful, they listened politely. He finished his dinner before the others were through and arose to leave without paying his bill. Mrs. Mallow became a trifle dismayed. Fortunately, the head-waiter halted him at the door and presented the slip. Stammering apologies, Mr. Baker paid his account, added a generous tip, and with a sheepish expression hurried away.

"Oh, dear, that man is hopeless!" Kitty laughed. "It wouldn't have been so funny, though, if we'd had to pay the bill."

By nine o'clock the berths were made up, and, since the girls knew they must be awake early the next morning in order to change trains at Benton Junction, they decided to retire immediately. Mrs. Mallow was to occupy the lower berth and Kitty and Doris the upper. They felt very adventurous indeed as they mounted the ladder to their "crowsnest."

"What if Ollie Weiser's snakes should get loose tonight!" Kitty giggled. "Wouldn't it be a scream?"

"Not if they came up here."

"Snakes can't climb, can they?"

"I'll bet Ollie Weiser's can do almost anything."

"Oh, well," Kitty murmured philosophically, as she snuggled down beneath the blankets, "if they come this way, they'll get Mrs. Mallow first."

With that the girls fell asleep. It was still dark when they were rudely awakened by the sound of a voice.

"Girls," Mrs. Mallow whispered, trying not to disturb others in the car, "we'll soon be at Benton Junction. You must hurry and dress."

"What a heathenish hour to get up!" Doris protested. "I was having the most beautiful dream."

"If we are carried past the junction, it won't be a dream," Mrs. Mallow assured her. "You have less than twenty minutes."

Doris and Kitty emerged from the dressing room just as the train began to slow down for the junction. They drew their wraps closer about them as they stepped down upon the platform, for the early morning air was brisk and cool.

Silas Baker followed Mrs. Mallow from the car, but Doris and Kitty did not see the magician and rather hoped he had overslept. However, as the train began to move slowly, he swung from the steps, the suitcases in his hands. His tie was crooked, and he had not taken time to shave.

"Almost forgot to get up," he grinned.

The train had stopped some distance from the station, and Mrs. Mallow and the girls looked

about uncertainly, wondering which way to go. As they appeared to hesitate, the magician pushed forward.

"This way, ladies," he directed, picking up Doris's hat bag. "Just follow your Uncle Dudley. I hit this burg so often I can feel my way around in the dark."

Without giving Mrs. Mallow an opportunity to rebuke him, he started off toward the station and there was nothing for the others to do but to follow. In a gentlemanly manner, Silas Baker offered to help Mrs. Mallow with her heavy suitcase. She graciously thanked him. As she walked behind the magician, she frowned, for his bold way displeased her. She felt that he was trying to become too friendly with her young charges.

The station was dark and uninviting. A sleepy-eyed clerk was on duty at the window and Mrs. Mallow at once presented herself to purchase tickets for Cloudy Cove.

"Afraid you have a long wait ahead, ma'am," the agent informed her, as he stamped the tickets. "Number 10 is an hour late."

"Just our luck," Kitty yawned. "Wish we could have spent that hour sleeping."

Ollie Weiser was the only member of the party who did not appear greatly disappointed that the train was not on time. He sat down beside the girls and tried to entertain them with what he con-

sidered amusing stories. At first they endeavored to listen politely, but, becoming bored beyond endurance, discouraged his attempts at conversation.

"You say you're staying at Cloudy Cove a couple of weeks?" he questioned Doris, ignoring the hints. "I'll be there about that long myself, so we should paint the town red, eh?"

"The color of the town doesn't interest me in the slightest," Doris retorted coldly. "I expect to be very busy all the time I am there." She turned to her chum. "Come, Kitty, let's go outside and see if the train is coming."

The two girls arose and left the station, closing the door behind them. The magician started to follow, but, observing that Mrs. Mallow's stern eye was upon him, slumped back into his seat and relapsed into moody silence.

"Isn't he the limit?" Kitty demanded, when the girls were alone. "I wish he'd stop trying to make a hit with us."

"He's getting worse all the time," Doris declared. "I suppose he'll annoy us all the way to Cloudy Cove and perhaps after we get there. Thank goodness, he doesn't know the name of our hotel."

"He'll find it, though. He's that sort. Don't you wish he'd miss his train?"

"No chance of that," Doris sighed. "He'll sit right there in the station until it comes in. The train is about due now."

She turned to gaze down the track and observed a block signal move into the quarter position.

"I guess that must be our train coming now," she said dismally.

"Oh, I wish something would happen to keep that man here! He'll make life miserable for us all the rest of the way."

"I suppose we'll just have to grin and bear it."

As she spoke, Doris cast a baleful glance toward the magician's two suitcases, which he had left outside the station. Suddenly a strange expression flashed over her face and she gripped her chum by the arm.

"Kitty! I just thought of something!"

"What?"

"It would be a mean sort of trick, though."

"Oh, what is it? Quick! Before the train gets here! Anything will be better than listening to that man the rest of the day!"

"I know a way to keep him here. We can open the suitcase and let out his snakes! He'd have to capture them before he could leave!"

"Doris! What a brilliant idea!"

"But do you think we should do it? If he should lose his snakes—"

"He won't lose them. It will just make him miss his train."

Doris glanced quickly toward the station and then down the track. She could see the train

rounding the bend less than a quarter of a mile away.

"Come on," she cried mischievously. "We'll just have time to do it! Take care as you pass the station window. If he sees us, we'll be caught!"

CHAPTER VII

A DISTASTEFUL INTRODUCTION

WITH a cautious glance in all directions to make sure that their actions would not be observed, Doris and Kitty slipped over to the large black suitcase which they knew contained the magician's pet snakes.

"It may be locked," Kitty whispered anxiously.

Nervously Doris fumbled with the fastening. The case was not locked, but she hesitated to open the lid, shivering at the thought of what was inside.

"Go on, scared cat!" Kitty dared.

Doris opened the lid a crack, and then both girls, frightened at their bravado, fell back, their eyes riveted on the case.

"The snakes aren't coming out," Kitty murmured apprehensively. "Give the suitcase a prod with your foot!"

"I should say not! You do it!"

Just at that moment the girls were relieved to see the first snake wriggle through the aperture. Another followed.

"Stay here and watch where they go!" Doris whispered in excitement. "I'll break the news to our friend Ollie."

She darted to the station, and flinging open the door, burst in upon the astonished travelers.

"Mr. Weiser, your snakes are getting away!" she cried. "Come quickly or they'll escape!"

The magician sprang to the door, thrusting Doris aside in his great anxiety to reach his pets. Mrs. Mallow and Silas Baker followed, gathering up their baggage as they heard the rumble of the approaching train.

Ollie Weiser took one look at the empty suitcase and groaned.

"Figi! Figi!" he shouted wildly.

He caught sight of one of the snakes and made a dive for it, just as the train came to a standstill.

"All aboard!" the conductor called.

Mrs. Mallow, Mr. Baker and a strange man who had just driven up in an automobile boarded the train, but the girls were reluctant to leave. Not until the conductor signalled to the engineer, did they scramble aboard.

The magician had found all but one of his snakes and was still calling wildly for Figi, who remained in hiding. He cast a despairing glance toward the conductor as that worthy swung aboard the moving train.

"Wait! Wait!" he shouted.

Doris leaned out of a window and called back to him:

"I saw one of your snakes crawl under that packing box!"

The girls were unable to control their laughter, as they went to join Mrs. Mallow and Silas Baker.

"You needn't explain," Mrs. Mallow smiled. "It's quite obvious how those snakes managed to escape just at train time!"

"It served him quite right," Mr. Baker chuckled. "There's another train late this afternoon. He can catch that."

"I hope he doesn't lose Figi," Doris said with a smile, "but at least he'll have the remainder of the day to look for it."

Before Mrs. Mallow or the girls could take seats, the stranger, who had boarded the train at the junction, came down the aisle and spoke to Mr. Baker. The latter politely acknowledged the greeting and turned to introduce him as Frank McDermott, an attorney from Cloudy Cove.

The man was very well dressed and apparently conscious of this fact. He carried a cane and wore a white gardenia in the lapel of his coat.

"Well! Well!" he observed in a loud voice, as he was presented to the girls, "so you young ladies let the snakes out of the box! That's one way to get rid of a troublesome admirer. Good joke! Ha, ha!"

As his loud laughter rang through the car, a number of the passengers turned to stare at him.

Doris and Kitty flushed and looked embarrassed. Mr. Baker frowned, obviously displeased at the lawyer's noisy manner.

"There's a seat toward the front of the car," he suggested, and the two moved on together.

"Thank goodness Mr. Baker steered him away," Doris murmured.

Of necessity the party had boarded a local for Cloudy Cove. The train stopped at every station, but, as it was only a short journey from the junction to their destination, the girls did not have time to become weary. In less than an hour the conductor called "Cloudy Cove," and they began to gather their belongings together with eager haste.

Mr. Baker came over to their seat as the train switched in on a side track.

"Almost there now," he said with a smile, and then in an undertone, "I wouldn't have introduced that man, but I couldn't very well get out of it."

"You say he is a lawyer from Cloudy Cove?" Mrs. Mallow inquired.

"Yes, but I'm sorry to say he doesn't enjoy a good reputation. He's very shrewd and crafty. Mind you, he was never caught in a dishonest deal, but he's been under suspicion more than once. Better not have business dealings with *him*."

"No danger of that," Doris laughed.

At that moment she little dreamed of the vital

part which the lawyer was to play in her affairs and those of the late John Trent.

Although Doris did not expect to see McDermott again, she studied his face rather curiously. It was a hard face, she decided. His jovial manner was but a mask for his inner self. Inwardly he was no doubt cruel and ruthless.

The train came to a full stop, and the party alighted. McDermott walked directly away, merely tipping his hat to Mrs. Mallow and the girls, but Mr. Baker remained to offer his services.

"Are you expecting someone to meet you?" he inquired.

Mrs. Mallow explained that they had engaged rooms at The Mayfair and would take a taxi. Mr. Baker helped them with their luggage and assisted them into the cab.

"I hope you have an enjoyable stay in our city," he said pleasantly. "If for any reason you should tire of the hotel, come out to my summer camp. Anyone can tell you where it is. We have a very choice list of guests."

"I'm sorry we didn't know about your place before we engaged our rooms," Mrs. Mallow said regretfully. "It would have been so much nicer there near the water."

"Excuse me," Mr. Baker interrupted hastily. "I'm afraid I've forgotten my umbrella. Left it on the train."

He bolted away, coat-tail flying in the breeze. Mrs. Mallow and the girls watched anxiously as he boarded the train, which fortunately had not yet left the station. A moment later they saw him reappear, clutching the umbrella, and then gave the order to drive on to the hotel.

"That man would lose his head if it weren't attached," Doris laughed. "You can't help liking him, though. He's so genuine."

In a few minutes the cab arrived at The Mayfair, a small but pleasant summer hotel. Mrs. Mallow went to the desk.

"I am Mrs. Mallow," she said to the clerk on duty. "I have a reservation—"

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Mallow," the young man replied, consulting a list tacked up on the side of a partition. "On the second floor. I am not sure that the rooms are ready, though."

"Do you mean," Mrs. Mallow asked, "that someone else is occupying them?"

The clerk smiled. "They have been, but the guests are leaving this morning."

At that moment word came that the rooms were ready, and the clerk handed Mrs. Mallow a pen, which he had dipped into a bottle of ink on the desk.

"Will you please register, Mrs. Mallow? I believe there's a telegram for you," the clerk said after she had signed her name. "Yes, here it is."

He took a yellow envelope from one of the mail boxes and handed it to her. Mrs. Mallow stood staring down at it but made no move to open it. Doris and Kitty hurried over toward her, alarmed by the frightened expression on her face.

"What is it?" they asked.

"A telegram," she murmured. "I'm afraid it's about Marshmallow and Dave! They shouldn't have started off in that old car! Oh, I'm afraid something dreadful has happened!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE MISER OF CLOUDY COVE

NERVOUSLY Mrs. Mallow ripped open the envelope and unfolded the slip of yellow paper. As she scanned the message, the tense lines of her face gradually relaxed.

"Has anything happened?" Kitty questioned anxiously.

Mrs. Mallow handed over the telegram and the girls eagerly noted the contents. It read:

"Trouble with car. Will reach Cloudy Cove Friday. Marshall."

"The old bus probably fell to pieces on the road," Doris laughed. "It's a relief to know they weren't in an accident."

"I'm glad Marshall thought of telegraphing," Mrs. Mallow commented. "I should have worried myself sick, if he hadn't arrived at the appointed time. I imagine it will be best to arrange ahead for the boys' room. I'll speak to the manager about it now."

She turned toward a ruddy-faced man of middle age whom the clerk had pointed out as Edgar Morehouse, the owner of The Mayfair. In response to her request that he reserve a room for

Dave and Marshmallow, he shook his head regretfully.

"We're filled up just now and it's doubtful that we'll have anything before the first of next week. You see, this is the height of our season here at Cloudy Cove. Nearly all of our guests engage rooms weeks in advance. At the present moment we have a long waiting list."

"But surely you can find something by Friday!" Mrs. Mallow protested.

"I am afraid not," the owner returned. "I shall be glad to place your name on the list and if there is a vacancy—"

"Can you recommend another hotel?"

"There are several here, but I fear you will be unable to secure accommodations on such short notice. Everything is crowded."

Mrs. Mallow came back to where the girls were waiting and told them how matters stood.

"It was foolish of me not to reserve their rooms when I did ours," she said in disappointment. "Of course, I couldn't be sure until the last minute that they would come with us."

"What will they do for a room?" Kitty asked.

"I'm sure I don't know. We must look around between now and Friday. It is certainly annoying."

The three followed the porter who took them to a pleasant, airy suite on the second floor. Al-

though The Mayfair hotel was an old building, it had been newly decorated and was considered to be one of the nicest in Cloudy Cove.

Mrs. Mallow sank wearily into the first chair available and removed her hat and gloves.

"The trip seemed to tire me," she declared. "I think it was listening to that magician that wore me out."

"Why don't you take a nap?" Doris suggested. "Kitty and I thought we might go for a walk, so we won't be here to disturb you."

"I believe I shall," Mrs. Mallow said. "After luncheon I must try to engage a room for Marshall."

After the girls had changed frocks and freshened up a bit, they set forth to view the city. Cloudy Cove was not large in population, but its location near the Bay of Thor brought great crowds of vacationers each summer. However, it was not toward the beach that the girls strolled, for Doris's interest lay in the business section of the city. As they passed a massive building of white stone, she observed that it was the National Bank.

"Let's go in!" she said impulsively to her chum. "I want to see the President just as soon as I can, about my Uncle John Trent's affairs."

The two girls entered the bank. Kitty hung back rather timidly, but Doris walked boldly to the window and asked for the President.

"Mr. Cooke does not see anyone without an appointment," she was informed. "If you will state your business—"

"It is of a confidential nature," Doris returned. "I must see Mr. Cooke!"

"He expects to be out of the city for the remainder of the week," the cashier told her, "but I can make an appointment for you to see him at ten o'clock Monday morning."

Doris thanked him and with Kitty left the building.

"It's a long time to wait," she fretted, "but I suppose it's the best I can do. Oh, dear, I'm so impatient to learn about the Estate!"

"I just feel it in my bones that you're going to get some money," Kitty declared confidently.

"I wish I could feel it in mine!"

The girls walked aimlessly about the streets, gazing at the shop windows and taking an interest in the vacation crowd. Unexpectedly they became aware that someone was calling them by name. Turning abruptly about, Doris saw Silas Baker, who was on the verge of stepping into a sedan parked at the curbing.

"Well, well, so we meet again!" he hailed them.

"I'm glad you rescued your umbrella after you left us," Kitty said.

"My umbrella?" The old gentleman's brow wrinkled, then he laughed. "To be sure! Just

as the train was pulling out. How do you girls like Cloudy Cove by this time?"

"We haven't seen much of it yet," Doris confessed.

"How would you like to visit my camp on the cove? I'm on my way there now."

"Oh, we'd love to!" Doris cried enthusiastically. "That is, if we can get back in time for luncheon. Mrs. Mallow will be expecting us."

"It won't take long. I'll drive you right back."

He opened the car door and the girls crowded into the front seat beside him. As they motored along the boulevard, Mr. Baker pointed out interesting landmarks. In all truth, Doris and Kitty paid more attention to the road than they did to the scenery, for their companion's driving was eccentric, to say the least. Twice, as a loud honking of horns sounded impatiently from the rear, they were called upon to remind him that a traffic light had changed from red to green.

Presently Mr. Baker turned the car into a private driveway, which led through a forest of dense timber to the edge of the cove. The girls gave a gasp of sheer delight as they caught their first glimpse of the deep, blue water and the glistening, white beach.

"It's real quiet out here," Mr. Baker said, as he turned off the motor, "but that's why some folks like it. I own fifty acres along the waterfront.

THERE LAY ONE OF THE MAGICIAN'S SNAKES!

Haven't done much with it yet. Just put up a bathhouse and a few cabins. Next year I may fix the place up more."

"I think it's lovely as it is," Doris declared.

The very quiet of it appealed to her, and she thought she had never before seen a more beautiful place. The beach was deserted, but far out across the water she could see a tiny fishing boat. A half dozen log cabins were scattered about the clearing and from three of them she noticed smoke curling upward.

"Are all of your cottages rented?" she inquired.

"No, I haven't advertised them," Mr. Baker explained. "Don't want just anyone, you know. Can't have folks throwing tin cans on the beach and littering the place up. I rent only to a certain class of people."

"Don't you wish we had come here instead of taking rooms at The Mayfair?" Kitty asked wistfully.

"Yes, I do," Doris agreed, "but I suppose it's too late to change now. But say! Wouldn't Dave and Marshmallow be crazy about this place!"

"Are there any fish in the water, Mr. Baker?" Kitty inquired.

"Any fish?" the old gentleman snorted. "It's the best place in three counties!"

"This spot would be paradise for Marshall and Dave, then," Kitty declared.

Doris had been doing some quick thinking. She knew that a room must be engaged for the boys before Friday and if what the hotel-keeper had said was true, it would be impossible to secure satisfactory accommodations at the town of Cloudy Cove. Dave and Marshmallow enjoyed "roughing it," and camp life would suit them admirably. Since Mr. Baker already had mentioned that his charge for cabins was reasonable, the plan of establishing the two at the camp appealed to her.

"Would you care to rent one of your cabins to Dave and Marshall?" she inquired. "We're expecting them Friday."

"Well," Mr. Baker hesitated, "if they're friends of yours, I'll take them, but I don't want any noisy young scamps about. This is a quiet camp and—"

"Oh, you'll like Dave and Marshmallow," Doris laughed. "Just show them the cove and tell them about the fish and that's the last you'll hear of them."

"Maybe you'd better pick out the cabin you want now. There's a nice one fronting the beach that they might like."

He led the way across the clearing, pausing on a knoll to point to a large maple tree.

"This marks the eastern boundary of my premises. That cottage you see through the trees doesn't belong to me. You can have your pick of any of the others that aren't occupied."

It was on the tip of Doris's tongue to ask who owned the cabin to the east of the camp, but already Mr. Baker had moved on down the path. The girls followed him to a quaint cottage overlooking the water. It was a four-room structure built entirely of unpainted logs. Chintz curtains hung at the windows and, as they stepped inside, they were delighted to see that the furniture was rustic. A large stone fireplace covered one side of the living room.

"Oh, it's adorable!" Doris cried. "I'm sure Dave and Marshmallow would like it."

Kitty had stepped to the door of one of the bedrooms and her quick eye had noted a suitcase under a bed.

"Why, someone appears to be living here!" she exclaimed. "This room is occupied."

A sheepish expression passed over Mr. Baker's face.

"I guess you can't have this one after all," he murmured. "I forgot that I rented it to a gentleman from New York."

Hastily the girls retreated, for they had no desire to appear to be invading a stranger's quarters.

"You can have the one next door," Mr. Baker assured them. "It's exactly the same."

Doris and Kitty inspected the other cabin and found it entirely satisfactory. They were so de-

lighted with it that they keenly regretted they were not to occupy it themselves.

"Perhaps I had better make a cash deposit now," Doris said as they turned to leave. "We want you to be sure not to forget that you have rented the cabin."

Mr. Baker accepted the deposit, although he assured them there was no need to make one. As they left the cabin, Doris saw by her wrist watch that it was getting late, and remarked that she must return to the hotel.

"I'll take you in right away," the old gentleman promised, "but first I want to show you where you can get good spring water."

The girls followed him along a path which led deeper into the forest. Passing the cottage which Doris had noticed some time before, they saw a queer-looking man sitting on the front porch smoking a pipe. His clothing was ragged and old, his hair unkempt, his shoes well worn, his face unshaven. A fierce looking hound lay drowsing at the side of his chair.

As the three approached, the man quickly arose, bowed to Mr. Baker, and vanished inside the cabin.

Doris had not obtained a distinct view of the stranger's face, but his general appearance had not impressed her. She knew that if disreputable persons lived near the camp, Mrs. Mallow would not wish Marshall to stay there.

Moreover, why should such a questionable-looking man be living here?

"Who is that man?" she asked Mr. Baker.

The old gentleman smiled broadly.

"Don't be alarmed by his appearance, Miss Force. He is quite harmless. Looks much worse than he is."

"But who is he?" Doris persisted.

"He calls himself Mr. Jay, but no one knows his real name. Folks just speak of him as the Miser of Cloudy Cove."

CHAPTER IX

AN OPPORTUNITY

"A MISER!" Kitty exclaimed with interest. "Where does this Mr. Jay hoard his gold?"

Mr. Baker shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"It's my honest opinion he hasn't any. Don't know why folks call him a miser. Guess it's because he lives out here summer and winter and doesn't take up with the townfolks. Decent sort of fellow, though."

"He seemed to run away when he saw us coming," Doris commented thoughtfully.

"Yes, he's shy when womenfolks come around."

"What does he do here by himself?" Kitty inquired curiously. "I should think it would be a very lonely sort of life."

"Yes," Mr. Baker agreed, "but it's the kind of existence he enjoys. He roams the woods with his dog, fishes a great deal, and during the winter hunts and traps. He never goes to town. Sometimes has me bring him a box of groceries or a bundle of books."

"What sort of things does he read?" Doris questioned.

"Nothing light. Tolstoy, and queer French

writers that I never heard of. Strange fellow all right, but perfectly harmless."

"Why does he live here by himself?" Doris demanded. "What brought him to Cloudy Cove in the first place?"

"You have me there. Mr. Jay never offered any information concerning himself, and, well, he's the sort of person you don't like to question."

After pausing at the spring for a drink of cold water, the girls returned to the car. As they drove back toward Cloudy Cove, Doris's thoughts continued to dwell upon Mr. Jay. What she had learned concerning his strange life aroused her curiosity.

"I'll tell Marshmallow and Dave they must try to become acquainted with him," she thought.

Mr. Baker dropped the girls at their hotel, after again assuring them that the cabin would be ready for the boys when they arrived Friday. Mrs. Mallow, upon learning what arrangements had been made, declared that she was highly pleased.

"They may fare better than we," she said. "I'm not so sure that I'll like this hotel. The service appears far from the best."

Doris and Kitty were not inclined to be critical, but after they had partaken of luncheon they, too, admitted their disappointment. Mrs. Mallow, who was an excellent cook, declared that the food was flat and unappetizing.

During the afternoon both the girls wrote letters and then went to their rooms to rest. Shortly after five o'clock Doris returned to the lobby to see if the mail had arrived. As she walked toward the desk, she was startled to see a familiar face. Ollie Weiser!

Doris stopped short, for she did not wish the magician to observe her. Her first thought was that he had followed her to the hotel, but she recalled that she had been very careful not to mention The Mayfair. Undoubtedly the choice of the same hotel was mere coincidence.

"Oh, dear, why did he have to come here?" she thought impatiently.

She moved quickly away, but just at that instant the magician turned and saw her. His face lighted up and he rushed over to her.

"Ah, I have found you again!" he cried.

"Did you recover all of your snakes?" Doris inquired with a feeble attempt at a smile.

The magician regarded her accusingly.

"Yes, I found them, Miss Force, but I cannot understand why you tried to punish me. I know that you and your friend opened the suitcase. My snakes are clever, but they are not smart enough to get out of a box without the aid of a human hand."

Doris looked confused and could think of nothing to say.

"However," Ollie Weiser went on brightly, "I'll forgive you both on one condition."

"And what is that?" Doris asked impatiently.

"That you dance with me after the entertainment tonight."

"What entertainment?"

"You have not heard! I am to appear in an act with my snakes and Madame Curly, the noted singer, will complete the bill."

"I hadn't heard anything about it," Doris commented dryly.

She turned as though to leave, but the magician caught her by the hand.

"Ah, Miss Force, you will dance with me after the show?"

Doris was provoked, but she did not wish to make a scene in the lobby. It seemed to her that the easiest way to escape was to grant Ollie Weiser's request. After all, perhaps she owed him a favor. Aware that several persons were watching curiously, she jerked her hand free.

"Yes, if you feel that I owe it to you, I'll give you one dance," she murmured hastily.

"Only one?"

"Only one!" Doris returned firmly.

Without stopping at the desk to inquire about the mail, she fled. She found Kitty already dressing for dinner and told her of the unpleasant meeting.

"Now what are we to do?" she wailed. "That man will pester us to death with his attention! I don't want folks to say I'm infatuated with a snake charmer!"

"No one knows us here," Kitty consoled, "and after all, he isn't so bad looking. Folks can't talk as long as we have Mrs. Mallow along as a chaperon. We'll stick close to her tonight and perhaps Ollie will be scared away."

"Not he!"

"We mustn't show our real feelings or he may make trouble for us, Doris. After all, we're in a strange town and we haven't any friends here. You're on an important mission and—"

"You're quite right," Doris interrupted decisively. "We must see the thing through, but it's going to be as pleasant as taking a dose of cod liver oil. Thank goodness, Dave and Marshmallow arrive tomorrow!"

Being informed of the promise Doris had made to the magician, Mrs. Mallow reluctantly agreed that the girls would be wise not to antagonize him. She assured them that she would maintain a watchful eye and to interfere if he became too aggressive. The prospect of an unpleasant evening was so discouraging that Doris was tempted not to dress especially for dinner, but when she saw Kitty decked in her gay finery, she brought her own evening dress out of the suitcase.

"Ollie will be crazier than ever about you when he sees you in that gown," Kitty teased.

Doris's response was a grunt of disgust and a slipper hurled with unerring accuracy.

She was indeed a picture in her Alice blue frock which accentuated her beauty, and her high heeled slippers added a full inch to her height.

"Wear the ruby ring the twins gave you!" Kitty pleaded.

When the girls and Mrs. Mallow entered the dining room some time later, their appearance caused many of the diners to glance up in admiration. Particularly did heads turn to look at Doris, for she was very lovely.

The three seated themselves at a table in an inconspicuous corner of the room, the girls casting an apprehensive glance about them. They were relieved that Ollie Weiser had not as yet put in his appearance.

The dinner was not of the best and Mrs. Mallow expressed her impatience.

"If we could secure rooms at another hotel I certainly should be tempted to change," she announced, as they left the dining room. "I'd like to show that chef a thing or two about cooking!"

Already a group of hotel guests had gathered in the parlor, where the evening's entertainment was to be given. Mrs. Mallow and the girls reluctantly turned their steps in that direction.

"I hope it doesn't last long," Mrs. Mallow said with a tired sigh. "I've had quite enough of snakes."

"Madame Curly is to sing," Doris told her. "I am sure you will enjoy hearing her, even if Ollie Weiser is a bore. She's quite noted."

Nearly all of the seats in the parlor were taken, and as they entered, the three paused uncertainly. While they were looking about for vacant chairs, Ollie Weiser rushed over to them.

"Miss Force," he began, laboring under great excitement, "a terrible thing has happened! Madame Curly has not arrived and the entertainment must start in ten minutes. We must find a substitute. Will you not take her place?"

"Why, how did you learn that I sing?" Doris asked in astonishment.

"I'm afraid I told him," Kitty confessed. "I just happened to mention it on the train."

"Really, I don't know what to say," Doris stammered.

"It is a wonderful opportunity," the magician urged.

"But Madame Curly is a professional singer, while I am only an amateur. The audience will be too critical."

At this moment the manager stepped up and added his plea to that of the magician. As Doris wavered, Mrs. Mallow said quietly:

"Why not do it, if you feel that you can? This will be a real test of your ability."

Doris cast a troubled glance over the audience, which she knew was composed largely of society folk. She realized that she was not being asked to do an easy thing. Yet the challenge of it appealed to her.

"I'll do it!" she announced.

CHAPTER X

DORIS'S DEBUT

THE moment Doris gave her promise to substitute for Madame Curly she was assailed with misgivings. She had brought no music with her and was forced to make her selection from the numbers which Miss Wesley, the accompanist, had at the hotel.

"I'm afraid I'll make a flop of it," she confided nervously to Kitty. "A poor accompanist can just ruin a piece and we haven't practised together."

She sat tensely, waiting for the program to begin, yet dreading the moment when she would be called. At last, after every seat in the parlor had been taken, the manager arose and explained that Madame Curly would be unable to appear. A murmur of disappointment passed over the crowd and Doris felt her spirits sink lower. She did not realize that her own name had been spoken until Kitty nudged her.

Doris forced a smile to her lips and took her place beside the piano. As from a far distance she heard Miss Wesley plunge into the opening measures of the song. She began to sing, and then, as she gained confidence in her accompanist, forgot to

be afraid. She lost sight of the fact that she was appearing before a critical audience, and lost herself in the music.

As the last note of the piano died away, there was a moment of silence; then thunderous applause burst forth. Doris offered another selection and would have slipped back to her seat, had the crowd permitted her to do so. She was called back for two encores.

"You covered yourself with glory, old dear!" Kitty whispered in delight, as her chum finally returned to her friends.

Ollie Weiser's demonstration of magic followed, but the audience became restless and a great many persons wandered away. Since Doris felt that she owed her opportunity to the magician, she remained out of sheer politeness, as did Kitty and Mrs. Mallow.

Everyone was relieved when the man left the floor and the chairs were cleared away for dancing.

"I wish we could escape to our rooms," Doris said.

There was no hope of it, for just then the magician came over to the girls, his face aglow with pleasure.

"I've just put the snakes to bed," he declared, "so now I'm free to devote myself to you girls for the rest of the evening."

"Really, I'm dreadfully tired," Doris protested. "I don't feel like dancing."

"But you promised," the magician said accusingly. "You're not going back on your word?"

"Oh, I suppose I can dance if you insist."

As Ollie whirled her about on the floor, Doris was forced to admit that he was an excellent dancer. Yet she could not help but wish that she were with Dave instead. She scarcely listened to his extravagant praise of her singing and was relieved when the dance ended. Kitty was forced to take her turn, but after one dance she, too, refused to remain in the parlor longer, pleading fatigue.

"Seems to me you girls get tired mighty easy," Ollie grumbled. "Oh, well, I'll be seeing you again."

"You're not staying here at the hotel?" Kitty demanded in dismay.

"Sure, the manager let me have a room over the kitchen." The magician was nothing if not frank. "It's a miserable dump, but as long as I'm not paying for it, I guess I shouldn't kick. Sort of like this town. Think I'll stick around for a week or two."

Doris and Kitty exchanged significant glances. They felt certain that Ollie Weiser was remaining on their account and they were at a loss to know just how to discourage his attentions. What a pest he was!

The man was unwilling that they should leave, and as Doris said goodnight, caught her by the hand and tried to hold her back.

"Can't you be a bit nicer to me?" he begged. "You'd like me, if you'd give me a chance to become better acquainted."

"It seems to me you're making the most of your opportunities!" Doris retorted.

She and Kitty hurried away, breathing a sigh of relief when they had reached their own room.

"That man annoys me beyond words," Doris snapped. She began to undress rapidly.

"Anyhow, he's a good dancer," Kitty offered. "I can almost forgive anything else in that kind of a person."

"I'm afraid I'm not as charitable as you are," Doris went on. "If my future dancing depended upon Ollie Weiser, I'd give up the fun of it altogether. You better hurry and get into bed, young lady."

"I think he's fallen hard for you, Dory."

"If he doesn't leave me alone, I'm going to do something rash! A snake charmer isn't my idea of a Prince Charming! I can see the girls at home giving me the laugh, if this story ever gets out."

Somewhat crossly Doris switched out the light and tumbled into bed beside her chum. So far she felt that everything had gone wrong. First, Marshmallow and Dave had been delayed. Then,

it appeared that there would be a long wait before she could see the President of the National Bank about her Uncle John Trent's Estate. It was all very annoying! To top it off, Ollie Weiser was bent upon making her existence an unhappy one!

Long after Kitty had fallen asleep, Doris lay awake thinking. Back at Chilton it had seemed an easy matter to come to Cloudy Cove and settle up the financial affairs of her uncle, but now she realized that it would not be as simple as she had anticipated. Things moved so slowly.

"Mrs. Mallow is a dear," she thought, "but she isn't very businesslike and I'm afraid won't be of much help to me. How I wish Uncle Ward could have come with me!"

After a time Doris fell into a troubled sleep. When she opened her eyes again, it was with the feeling that something was wrong. She found herself wide awake, though she could not imagine what had disturbed her. Kitty was sleeping soundly beside her.

"I must have had a bad dream," she told herself.

Resolutely closing her eyes again, she turned over on her side and tried to sleep. Suddenly she heard a strange, crackling noise.

Startled, Doris sat up in bed and listened intently. Had she imagined it? No, there it was again. Something *was* amiss.

Springing from the bed, she rushed to the win-

dow and looked down. She saw a red glare against a pane of glass, and shooting flames. They leaped upward from the vicinity of the kitchen wing.

For an instant Doris was too startled to cry out. Then she ran to Kitty, shaking her violently.

"Fire!" she warned. "Quick! We must wake Mrs. Mallow and get out of here!"

CHAPTER XI

FIRE!

"WHAT is it?" Kitty murmured drowsily, nestling deeper into the blankets.

"The hotel is on fire!" Doris cried, dragging her from the bed. "Get dressed as quickly as you can! There's not a minute to lose!"

"Oh!"

Assured that her chum was thoroughly awakened, Doris ran into the adjoining room to arouse Mrs. Mallow. Already she could smell the smoke and hear people rushing down the halls. Frightened shouts were to be heard from all parts of the building.

Mrs. Mallow was out of bed in an instant, but, as she realized the danger, she became so excited she could not find her clothing. Doris switched on the light, thrust the garments into her hands, and raced back to her own room.

Kitty was nearly dressed and it required but a moment for Doris to slip into her clothing. Frantically, they tore their clothes from the hangers and thrust them helter-skelter into the suitcases.

Their own luggage ready, the girls hurried to the aid of Mrs. Mallow. Fortunately, she had re-

moved only a few articles from her bag and it required but an instant to sweep the dresser clear and cram other scattered objects inside.

"Hurry!" Doris commanded, flinging a coat over Mrs. Mallow's shoulders.

"My purse!" Kitty cried, rescuing it from a bureau drawer.

Smoke had commenced to filter into the suite and the three dared tarry no longer. Snatching up their bags, they rushed out into the hall. The elevator did not appear to be running, so Doris led the way to the stairs. Halfway down she suddenly halted and gave a little cry of horror.

"Oh, I've left my ruby ring!"

"You can't go back," Kitty warned, catching her chum by the arm.

"I must get it! I believe there's time. You two go on!"

Before Mrs. Mallow could prohibit the rash act, Doris dropped her heavy bag and dashed back up the stairs. Groping through the hall she found her room and entered. The lights were off and she could see nothing. Blindly she made her way toward the dresser. She distinctly remembered leaving the ring in the pin tray. She must find it!

She stumbled over a chair and fell against the dresser. Eagerly she ran her hand over the top in search of the tray. If she only had a light!

Suddenly her hand touched it and with a cry of

joy she located the ring and slipped it on her finger. At that instant a blazing timber fell into the court below the suite window. At the sound of the loud crash Doris bolted for the door.

Smoke was now so dense in the hall that she could scarcely get her breath. The heat was terrific. At the far end of the hall Doris could see leaping flames, and the sight threw her into a momentary panic.

"Trapped!" she thought.

Then her mind cleared and she raced for the stairs. The fire had not reached there. Coughing and choking, she groped her way down to the lobby. What had become of Kitty and Mrs. Mallow? She hoped they had reached safety.

Someone grasped her by the arm. It was Kitty.

"We were dreadfully frightened! It took you such a long time!"

"I found the ring all right!" Doris gasped.

The lobby was comparatively clear of smoke, but fearful lest the floor above topple upon their heads Mrs. Mallow and the girls rushed to the door. A large group of men, women and children had gathered outside, many of them scantily robed.

"I wonder if everyone is out?" Mrs. Mallow murmured anxiously.

"I didn't see anyone in the halls," Doris returned. "Why aren't the firemen here?"

Just then they heard the familiar siren and two

red engines swung into view. In a twinkling the men had their ladders up and several streams of water were trained upon the blaze.

"The fire seems to be confined to the east wing," Mrs. Mallow observed. "If you hadn't awakened us when you did, Doris, we'd have been burned in our beds."

Several of the firemen had entered the building and the girls watched anxiously for their return. Two women were carried out, but, although they were unconscious, they quickly revived once they breathed the fresh air.

"I guess everyone is out now," Mrs. Mallow said in relief. She had just overheard the excited manager talking with the fire chief.

Doris and Kitty were eager to aid in the rescue work, but it appeared that there was little to be done. Fortunately, no one had been injured. Several women whimpered and sobbed, but only from hysteria. However, the early morning air was chilly and few of the hotel guests were heavily clothed. Many of them had been forced to abandon all of their baggage. Everyone shivered from the cold, until a generous quick-lunch owner volunteered to serve hot coffee. Doris and Kitty were assigned to the task of pouring out the steaming liquid to the dejected hotel guests, neglecting their own appetites entirely.

"I guess they'll be able to save most of the build-

ing, after all," Doris commented, as she surveyed the smoking ruin of the east wing.

The firemen had worked swiftly and effectively, with the result that very soon after their arrival on the scene they had the fire well under control. However, before the blaze could be extinguished, the east wing had been reduced to a blackened shell and the entire hotel was damaged by smoke and water. The manager, greatly distraught, went from one guest to another, assuring them that the hotel would be ready for occupancy within a week or ten days.

"A week nothing!" Doris remarked. "He'll be lucky if he gets the place fixed up in a month."

"The hotel wasn't much to boast of, even before the fire," Mrs. Mallow said dryly, "but I must say that this disaster comes at a most inconvenient time for us. Every hotel in Cloudy Cove jammed! I guess we'll have to go back home."

"Oh, we can't do that, until I've settled up the Estate," Doris put in quickly.

"But what are we to do?" Mrs. Mallow gazed dejectedly at the bags which were spread out about her. "We can't camp on the street."

A flash of inspiration came to Doris.

"Camp!" she cried exultingly. "That's just what we can do. We'll all go out to Mr. Baker's grounds and live in the cabins!"

"And eat Mrs. Mallow's home cooking," Kitty

added. "It will taste a lot better than this hotel food, too!"

"I never thought I'd care for camping," Mrs. Mallow said doubtfully, "but it seems we have no choice. As soon as Marshall and Dave come, we'll move our things out there."

Since they could not stand on the street, the three took their bags and went to a nearby restaurant, where they ordered breakfast.

"Wonder what became of Ollie Weiser?" Kitty asked, as they lingered over their toast and cocoa. "Have you seen him since the fire, Doris?"

"No, I haven't. I hope nothing happened to him. He was sleeping in a room over the kitchen, and that seemed to be where the fire started."

"I heard the firemen say no one was trapped inside, so he must have escaped," Mrs. Mallow declared. "What caused the fire, anyway?"

"No one seems to know," Kitty told her. "There's to be an investigation."

The discussion was brought to a sudden end as Doris sprang up from her chair, pointing excitedly out of the window at a dilapidated car which had stopped at the curb near the hotel.

"Marsh and Dave!" she cried.

The three hurried from the restaurant, joyfully greeting the two travelers.

"So this is The Mayfair!" Marshmallow drawled, as he surveyed the ruins.

"We heard about the fire and were terribly worried," Dave told Doris with a relieved smile. "Thought you folks might have been hurt."

"I'm about starved," Marshmallow broke in upon them. "Let's get something to eat at this restaurant. We can talk things over inside while we are eating."

They all went into the eating place, but Mrs. Mallow and the girls did not order again. While the two young men ate breakfast, the girls gave a graphic account of the fire. In turn, Dave told of their own experiences since leaving Chilton. They had been forced to change four flat tires, and in addition they had had trouble with the clutch, necessitating a half day's wait at a small-town garage.

"Where to now?" Marshmallow asked, after he had finished his second plate of pancakes.

Doris told him of the plan to stay at Mr. Baker's summer camp. As she had anticipated, both Marshmallow and Dave were enthusiastic over the idea and announced their eagerness to start for the cove at once.

"I'll be glad to go some place where I can clean up and properly dress myself," Mrs. Mallow sighed, as she climbed into the old car. "I feel like a scarecrow."

In a few minutes the party arrived at the camp, and even Mrs. Mallow became enthusiastic as she

examined the cottages, declaring that she liked the place better than the hotel.

"It was really a lucky break for us that the hotel burned," Doris laughed. "We'll have a regular lark here!"

"It's certainly nice," Dave commented.

The party found Mr. Baker at one of the cabins, as he had chanced to drive out from Cloudy Cove early that morning. He was delighted to have Mrs. Mallow and the girls join his little colony and promised them a cabin next door to that already assigned to the boys. As soon as the bags were unpacked, Mrs. Mallow stretched herself out on the bed, announcing that she intended to get a little rest before luncheon. Doris and Kitty were jolly, notwithstanding all that they had gone through. Leaving Mrs. Mallow, they escorted Marshmallow and Dave about the camp.

"Gee, this is great," said Marshmallow enthusiastically. "Who wants hotel life, anyway?"

Kitty giggled. "Ask Doris if she doesn't prefer it, though. Dancing, you know—"

Doris shot her a dark look. Dave glanced up inquiringly at the two girls, but neither of them offered an explanation. As a matter of fact, Doris was eager to change the subject, so she said:

"Come on down to the water. It's lovely, and we were told there were lots of fish just waiting to be caught."

"Hurrah!" exulted Marshmallow, who loved this sport.

"The people here seem to be pleasant," Doris went on, "although there is one odd-looking man."

They pointed out the cabin occupied by Mr. Jay and repeated all that they had learned concerning the miser.

"We'll have to get acquainted with him," Dave declared.

When the young people returned from the beach, Mrs. Mallow insisted that she was sufficiently rested to consider the matter of stocking up the kitchen shelves.

"We must go to town and purchase supplies," she declared. "It will seem good to have a home-cooked meal again."

Marshmallow and Dave volunteered to buy the groceries, but Mrs. Mallow, not entirely trusting their judgment on such matters, decided to go with them. Since the car did not carry five passengers comfortably, Doris and Kitty remained at the cabin.

After the others had left, they busied themselves rearranging furniture and unpacking their bags. Many of their frocks had been badly mussed, but they consoled themselves with the thought that camp life would not require preciseness of dress.

"They should be getting back pretty soon,"

Doris remarked, going to the window to look out. "I'm beginning to get hungry—"

The words trailed off.

"Kitty!" she cried. "Now we are in for it! Look who's here!"

Kitty moved over to the window and glanced out. Ollie Weiser was walking rapidly toward their cabin!

CHAPTER XII

OLLIE WEISER AGAIN

As the girls beheld the magician coming from the direction of the woods, they turned quickly away, but not before he had caught sight of them at the window. His face lighted up and he quickened his step.

"Now we are in for it!" Doris repeated in disgust. "Just our luck!"

"Let's not open the door," Kitty suggested.

"He saw us," Doris returned with a sigh, "so I'm afraid we'll have to."

Reluctantly she went to the door as the magician knocked, but did not look overjoyed at seeing him.

"Didn't expect to find you girls here," he declared, boldly walking in without waiting for an invitation. "Cosy little place you have."

"We like it," Kitty replied shortly.

"Came out here to see Mr. Baker about taking a cottage myself."

"He rented one to you?" Doris questioned almost fearfully.

Ollie Weiser shook his head gloomily.

"The old cod didn't seem to take much of a

fancy to me. Neither did that seedy fellow who lives over there in the woods."

"You mean Mr. Jay?" Doris inquired with interest.

"Don't know his name, but I do know he has a mighty vicious dog. The hound tried to take a chunk out of my leg, when I went to the spring for a drink of water! I complained to Mr. Baker and he had the nerve to tell me the dog was trained to run off undesirables!"

"Perhaps Mr. Baker doesn't want your snakes around the place," Doris suggested, smiling. "They might frighten the guests."

"It wasn't on account of the snakes that he wouldn't rent me a cabin," the magician said. "You see, I sold the lot of 'em this morning."

"You sold your snakes?" Doris echoed. "Why, what do you intend to do now?"

The magician shrugged his shoulders indifferently and grinned.

"Oh, I'll find something. I'd like to have kept my snakes but I needed new suitcases for 'em and right now I'm rather low in funds. Guess I'll think up a new graft."

As he spoke, Ollie Weiser eyed Doris meditatively. When she did not respond, he went on more enthusiastically:

"You know, you put on a pretty keen act last night. You've got a voice!"

"I am glad you like it," Doris returned politely.

"I've been thinking we ought to team up together. You know, develop a first-class act—singing and dancing. Inside of a year we should make big money."

"You want me to go on the stage with you?" Doris demanded, scarcely believing her ears.

"Sure. 'Course you haven't had much experience, but I think you could make a go of it. You sing and I'll dance."

For her further enlightenment the magician executed a few steps of tap dancing, humming his own accompaniment. Doris scarcely knew whether to be amused or offended. Such conceit! Ollie Weiser actually believed he was conferring an honor upon her by requesting her to become his stage partner!

"Don't you think you could use me, too?" Kitty broke in, before Doris could frame an answer. "Perhaps I could be nurse-maid to the snakes."

"Oh, the snakes are out of the picture now," the magician assured her, failing to recognize the sarcasm. "Maybe we could work you in somewhere, though. What do you do? Dance?"

"Really, it seems to me you are most presumptuous," Doris said, speaking a trifle coldly. "Neither Kitty nor I would think of joining your act."

"Then you don't know a real opportunity when it's offered you. Come on, say you'll do it."

He moved over to Doris and laid his hand on her arm. She backed away.

"I'll have nothing whatever to do with your performance," she announced coldly. "Kitty and I have some work to do now, so if you'll please leave—"

"Come, now, don't get on your high horse," Ollie pleaded, edging nearer. "You're turning down a good offer. What do you say?"

"I say 'no'!" Doris snapped, becoming angry at the man's persistence. "Will you go now?"

"Oh, I think I may as well stick around for dinner," the magician said easily, grinning in an irritating fashion. "Haven't had anything to eat today."

For an instant Doris was smitten with remorse, but the sympathy passed as quickly as it came, for she saw that the man was deliberately endeavoring to play upon her feelings.

"Lost part of my baggage in the fire, too," he went on sadly.

"We're sorry about that, of course," Doris returned gravely, "but there's nothing we can do. We can't even give you anything to eat, for there won't be a scrap of food until Mrs. Mallow gets back from the store."

"I'm nearly broke," the magician confessed in a melodramatic voice, which failed to impress his listeners. "I don't know what I'll do, Miss Force,

if you don't go in with me on the act. Oh, say you'll do it!"

"You could get work here in Cloudy Cove!" Doris suggested tartly.

"Would it mean anything to you, if I did find a good job?"

Doris gazed helplessly at Kitty. What could one do with such a man?

She was not forced to reply to the bold question, for just at that moment she heard the sound of an automobile coming down the private road to the camp.

"It must be Dave and Marshmallow!" she cried hopefully, hurrying to the window.

As the car came into sight and halted not far away, she saw to her disappointment that it was not the familiar car. Two men alighted. Doris recognized the owner of The Mayfair hotel and Mr. McDermott, the lawyer whom Mr. Baker had apologetically presented to her on the train.

"Why, they're coming this way!" she observed in surprise.

Ollie Weiser nervously picked up his hat and went toward the door.

"I think I'd better be moving along."

Doris and Kitty were so delighted to have him go, that they failed to observe his haste.

However, if the magician had hoped to depart before the arrival of the two newcomers, he was

doomed to disappointment. He swung open the door to face the hotel-keeper and his companion. Slightly taken aback, he mumbled something and made a move as though to pass them.

The hotel-keeper caught him firmly by the arm.

"Not so fast there!" he said gruffly. "We'll have a word with you."

"Sorry, but I'm in a hurry to get back to town. What is it you want?"

"You know well enough what we want," the hotel-keeper returned grimly. "Before you leave here you'll answer a few questions!"

CHAPTER XIII

AN EMBARRASSING SITUATION

"WELL, what do you want to know?" Ollie Weiser demanded uncomfortably.

"We have a few questions to ask you regarding the fire last night," Edgar Morehouse told him. "Perhaps we had better speak privately."

"I don't know anything about the fire," the magician mumbled, but Doris and Kitty observed that he was ill-at-ease.

"We'll soon find out about that," said McDermott.

"Somebody's going to pay for the damage, and you were right there in—"

"Better let me handle this, Morehouse," the lawyer interrupted. "You really better not talk."

The two girls felt very uncomfortable and wished Mrs. Mallow or the boys would come. Ollie Weiser seemed to sense this, and said:

"Gentlemen, these two young ladies should be considered. They had nothing to do with the fire, any more than I did, and I can't see why they should be included in this unpleasant conversation."

Doris and Kitty in their relief almost forgave Ollie Weiser for all the annoyance he had caused

them. At once, though, they both realized that it was on his account, and not on theirs, that these unpleasant men had come to the cottage.

The hotel-keeper seemed inclined to ignore the snake-man's remarks, but the lawyer raised his hand to warn his companion not to speak, and turned to Ollie Weiser.

"Kindly step outside!" Frank McDermott said in a tone that made it a command. "Your friends will excuse you, I am sure."

The three men left the cabin, closing the door behind them. Kitty and Doris looked at each other in chagrin. It was a relief to be rid of the magician, but at the same time they felt that if he were in trouble their apparent association with him would not be in their favor.

"Did you hear what the hotel-keeper said?" Kitty questioned when they were alone. "He intimated that Ollie knows something about the fire."

Doris nodded.

"I imagine they're trying to find out what caused it."

"But why should they question Ollie Weiser?"

"I'm sure I don't know, unless it was because he had a room over the kitchen."

"You don't suppose he set the place on fire?"

"Not on purpose, certainly. He did act strangely when those men came to the door."

The girls had no intention of trying to overhear

the conversation which was in progress just outside the cabin, but as the three men unthinkingly paused near the window, it was impossible not to hear what they were saying.

"Look here!" the lawyer began in a blustering voice, "you know something about this affair and you'd better tell! Morehouse has given me the case and I intend to sift it to the bottom."

"How should I know what caused the fire?" the magician muttered.

"You were sleeping directly over the kitchen and it was in that wing that the fire started."

"Yes, and it was a lucky thing I wasn't roasted alive!" Weiser retorted. "If you're trying to insinuate I started that fire, you're crazy!"

"You'd better come clean!" McDermott warned in an unpleasant tone. "As it happens, we have some pretty conclusive evidence."

"Evidence?"

"A light was seen in your room about three o'clock in the morning," the hotel-keeper informed him severely. "Tell us what you were doing abroad at that hour."

"I was looking for one of my pet snakes," Weiser admitted unwillingly. "He got out of the box."

"Ah," McDermott caught him up triumphantly, "where did you find your snake?"

"In the closet."

Doris and Kitty looked at each other.

"So! And did you use a flashlight in your search of the nooks and crannies?"

"Well, I—that is—" the magician stammered.

"The truth of the matter is that you used matches!" the lawyer announced.

"Well, I admit I didn't have a flashlight," Weiser said reluctantly. "I was careful, though, and stamped out every match I used."

"Oh, yes," the hotel-keeper broke in angrily, "that's your story. The fact remains that the fire broke out shortly before four o'clock and that it started in the vicinity of your room! Through your carelessness I have lost at least twenty-five thousand dollars."

"I tell you the fire didn't start in my room!" the magician protested vehemently. "I think perhaps it started in the kitchen. When I woke up my room was filled with smoke. I looked out the window and saw the blaze coming up from below."

"You can't expect us to believe such a flimsy story," McDermott told him. "You'll have to go back to town with us."

The magician continued to protest his innocence, but Doris and Kitty saw the hotel-keeper march him off to the car. McDermott remained behind, rapping sharply on the door. After a slight hesitation, Doris opened it.

"I want to talk to you two girls," the lawyer announced bluntly.

Neither Doris nor Kitty replied, and after a searching look directed at them, McDermott continued:

"What do you know about this fellow Weiser?"

The girls would have been willing to have answered questions, but they could not help resenting the lawyer's blunt and surly manner. They recalled his polite ways when they had met him on the train and judged that he adapted his personality to suit the occasion. Even now, with a crimson carnation in the lapel of his coat, he appeared quite dapper, yet his smile was sinister and his eyes cruelly penetrating.

There was a long moment of silence before Doris answered the question.

"We know very little about the man."

"So!" McDermott looked at her sharply and smiled in a maddening way. "No particular friend of yours, eh?"

"Certainly not. We met him quite by chance."

Again the lawyer smiled. Doris resisted an impulse to push him out of the door and slam it shut in his face. He goaded her beyond endurance!

"When did you last see Weiser on the night of the fire?"

"Why, right after the entertainment. Kitty and I went to our room early."

Kitty nodded in affirmation.

"When did you discover that the hotel was on fire?"

"Really, I can't say. It must have been about four o'clock, or perhaps a little later."

"Where would you say that the fire started?"

Doris hesitated. She had no liking for Ollie Weiser, but she realized that suspicion was already directed against him. If she told the lawyer that the blaze had started in the east wing, apparently near the magician's room, the case against him would be that much stronger. Doris had no wish to protect the man, particularly if he were guilty, but from the snatch of conversation she had overheard there was a reasonable doubt in her mind that Weiser was responsible for the fire. She knew well enough that McDermott would suffer no pangs of conscience at convicting a man on circumstantial evidence.

"How should I know where it started?" she evaded. "My main interest was to get out of the building."

"Why drag us into this affair, anyway?" Kitty broke in impatiently.

"I think you know more than you intend to tell," the lawyer returned, his lips curling in a slight sneer. "Did that fellow confess to you that he accidentally started the fire?"

"Of course he didn't!" Kitty contradicted.

"Really, it isn't fair of you to involve us in the

affair of a chance acquaintance," Doris declared impatiently. "If we knew what caused the fire, we should tell you."

McDermott turned toward the door.

"I see you've made up your minds not to talk, so I'll go. I warn you we're not through with the investigation. You may be called upon to testify."

With that he left them and walked swiftly toward the car, where Weiser and Edgar Morehouse were waiting.

"How I detest that man!" Doris breathed, when he was beyond hearing distance. "You can see he doesn't really care to get at the facts in the case. He's made up his mind to prove Weiser guilty at all costs."

"It looks bad for the snake-man, doesn't it?"

"I'm afraid so," Doris admitted.

"Well, we probably won't be bothered with him hanging around here any more."

"That's so," Doris smiled, "but it will be a shame if McDermott convicts him when he isn't guilty. I wish we really knew something about the affair."

"Strange he sold his snakes so soon after the fire," Kitty commented thoughtfully. "If McDermott knew that, he'd be certain he had his man."

"I know, it does look suspicious."

The two girls stood in the open doorway watching McDermott as he made his way to the auto-

mobile. They saw him speak curtly to the other two and then get in beside Weiser.

"Wonder what they intend to do with him?" Kitty asked.

Doris did not answer, for her attention was attracted by a loud cry from the woods.

"Wait!" a voice called.

To the surprise of the girls Mr. Jay emerged from the timber, and carrying a glittering object in his hand hurried toward the automobile.

CHAPTER XIV

MEETING MR. JAY

"It's the old miser!" Kitty exclaimed. "What ails him, anyway?"

"Maybe he knows something that will clear Ollie Weiser," Doris returned quickly. "Let's go see!"

Motivated by curiosity, the girls left the cabin and walked over toward the automobile. They were just in time to hear McDermott impatiently ask the old man what he wanted.

Mr. Jay held up a gold watch and chain for their inspection.

"I found this on the path," he said, addressing Ollie Weiser. "I thought maybe you dropped it, when my dog chased you."

"Yes, it's mine," the magician responded, reaching out his hand to take the watch. "Didn't know I'd lost it. Thanks!"

"Hold on there," McDermott interposed, taking the watch before the magician had an opportunity. "Let me see it."

"Say, what's the big idea? That's my watch. Hand it over!"

"All in good time," the lawyer returned. "Ah,

just as I suspected! This watch has the initials 'R. H.' on the case. Now how do you explain that?"

"The watch belonged to my uncle. It's an heirloom."

The lawyer regarded him with grudging admiration.

"You can certainly think of them fast."

"It's the truth. My Uncle Rawley—"

"Never mind elaborating," McDermott interrupted, handing him the watch. "Take it. You'll have an opportunity to prove all of your yarns, before we get through with you."

With only a careless look directed at the miser, who stood at the side of the car, the lawyer started the motor and drove off. Mr. Jay shook his head in a baffled sort of way and turned to leave. Doris, thinking she saw an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the old man, ventured to speak.

"Your dog doesn't seem to like strangers."

"What's that?" Mr. Jay glanced up quickly, a trifle startled. "Oh, his bark's worse than his bite. I've trained him to run tramps off the place, but he won't hurt a soul. Rip hasn't a vicious hair on his back!"

The miser's voice was low pitched and surprisingly cultured, not at all in keeping with his appearance. He did not look directly at the girls as he spoke, and started to move away. Doris was

unwilling to see him go, for she wished to know him better.

"Perhaps you can tell us where we might rent a boat," she said, using that as a pretext for continuing the conversation.

"What sort of boat do you want?"

"Oh, anything that doesn't leak. We'll want it for fishing."

"I have a boat I can let you have tomorrow, if you like."

"That's very kind, I'm sure," Doris returned gratefully. "Of course, we'll pay you for it."

"You may have it for nothing, if you'll promise to take good care of it."

"Oh, thank you!" both girls said together, and Doris added, "We'll be careful in using it."

Kitty ventured a question. "Is there good fishing here, Mr. Jay?"

"Yes—yes indeed. Very good."

"I suppose," Doris said, "that one could fish at any time of year in this place."

"I go out myself in all the seasons," the elderly man answered her. "Sometimes there are bad storms—especially in the winter."

"Oh," Kitty murmured, hunching her shoulders up as if she were cold, "I shouldn't like to go out on that water in wintertime."

Mr. Jay allowed a smile to play across his face, and turned to leave the girls.

"Perhaps," Doris offered, "you would come with us on our fishing trip. We should like you to."

"Oh, no. Thank you. No. I could not."

The old man walked slowly away, but paused after he had taken a few steps.

"I'll show you where the boat is hidden, when you're ready for it." He gazed hard at Doris, searching every line of her face. "You look like someone I once knew," he muttered, so indistinctly that the girls scarcely caught the words.

Doris did not know what to reply, and while she was groping for words, she heard the rumble of Marshmallow's car. It wheezed to a standstill near the cabin and Dave helped Mrs. Mallow to alight.

"We bought enough groceries to feed an army!" Marshmallow shouted boisterously. He was always in a good humor when a meal was in prospect.

Mrs. Mallow came over to where the girls were standing, and Doris turned to introduce Mr. Jay. To her surprise she saw that he had retreated at sight of the party. She caught a fleeting glimpse through the trees, as the old man walked rapidly toward his cabin.

"I guess I frightened him," Mrs. Mallow laughed. "We've been hearing a lot about Mr. Jay at the stores."

"What did you learn?" Doris questioned eagerly.

"Oh, nothing of consequence. The tradespeople haven't much time for him, because he seldom buys anything at the stores. They say he's very miserly."

"Miserly! Well, perhaps, but he didn't show it just now, did he, Kitty?"

"I should say not. He offered to let us use his boat tomorrow and he refused to accept money."

"Hurrah!" shouted Marshmallow.

"That doesn't sound miserly," Mrs. Mallow admitted. "He may be a nice old man, but his appearance is positively disreputable. I wonder if he's entirely safe?"

Doris and Kitty laughed outright.

"I thought the same until I talked with him," Doris confessed. "In spite of his clothing you can tell he is a gentleman."

"He must have been handsome when he was young," Kitty added. "If only he would spruce up a bit."

Mrs. Mallow and the girls returned to the cabin, while Marshmallow and Dave brought in the groceries. As they sorted the packages and placed them on the kitchen shelves, Doris and Kitty related what had befallen Ollie Weiser.

"It doesn't surprise me greatly," Mrs. Mallow declared. "I can't bear the sight of him."

"Say, who is this fellow I hear so much about?" Dave demanded somewhat jealously, although he

A LARGE FISH FLASHED OUT OF THE WATER

Doris Force at Cloudy Cove *Page 119*

grinned as he asked the question. "How old is he?"

"Oh, a little older than you, I'd judge," Doris told him, a mischievous gleam in her eyes.

"Good-looking?"

"Fair."

"H-m, I'll have to look into this. Can't have anyone cutting in on me."

"Sure, better look him up," Marshmallow advised. "A fellow that can charm a snake can probably fascinate the fair sex, too."

"What a backhanded compliment!" Kitty protested.

Everyone lent a hand to help Mrs. Mallow with the luncheon, and soon the kitchen was filled with savory odors. Kitty kept close watch of Marshmallow, for when the others turned their backs, he was inclined to "sample" the various dishes, until she feared there would be nothing left on the table but empty dishes.

After luncheon the boys unpacked their bags, Mrs. Mallow and the girls helping them to get settled in the cabin next door. The afternoon was spent rather indolently, for everyone was tired. Several times Doris glanced curiously in the direction of Mr. Jay's cabin, but he was nowhere to be seen.

"He doesn't like people," she told herself.

That night, long after Kitty had fallen asleep,

Doris lay awake thinking of many things. For some reason she felt strangely excited, and yet she knew that the sensation had not been occasioned by the many events of the day.

"Tomorrow I intend to talk with Mr. Jay again," she assured herself just before she dropped off to sleep. "There's something about him—can't define it—that intrigues my interest. What could he have meant by saying I looked like someone he once knew?"

CHAPTER XV

A FISHING TRIP

Doris and her friends were abroad early the next morning. After a refreshing dip in the waters of Cloudy Cove, they all did justice to the breakfast Mrs. Mallow had prepared, and talked over the plans for the day.

"I can't see the bank president until Monday, so in the meantime I may as well play around," Doris declared. "I vote we go fishing. Next week I may be so involved in financial affairs I'll not have the chance."

Marshmallow and Dave enthusiastically agreed to the suggestion, and Kitty promised that she would go for the boat ride, since she could never bring herself to bait a hook.

"You said Mr. Jay would let us have his boat?" Dave inquired.

"Yes, I'll ask him about it right away," Doris returned, arising from the breakfast table. "I wish I had some excuse for going over to his cabin. I hate to ask a favor the first thing."

"I baked a cake yesterday afternoon," Mrs. Mallow informed her. "Why not take that as an offering?"

"A splendid idea!" Doris approved. "The poor man probably hasn't tasted home cooking in years."

"Or any other kind, if what the tradespeople say is true," Dave interposed.

"Why not take half a cake?" Marshmallow suggested a trifle wistfully.

"Greedy boy!" Mrs. Mallow laughed good-naturedly. "Never fear, you shall have your cake for luncheon. I'll bake another while you are fishing."

As soon as the breakfast dishes were cleared away, Doris and Kitty set forth with the chocolate cake carefully wrapped in waxed paper. They approached the cabin in the woods somewhat timidly, wondering if the dog would take offense at their visit.

Doris knocked firmly on the door and after a minute or two the miser opened it.

"We've brought you a cake," Kitty announced.

"A cake?" the old man repeated in surprise, running a grimy hand through his unkempt locks of gray hair. "Well, that's nice of you, I'm sure."

He accepted the package rather awkwardly, and shifted from one foot to another as though at a loss to know what more to say. Yet as he unwrapped the cake, he gazed at it hungrily.

"Were you aiming to go out on the lake today?" he inquired after a little hesitation.

"Why, yes, if we may use your boat," Doris said with a smile.

"It's a little late in the day for good fishin', but there's a west wind, so maybe you'll have luck. Step inside while I get my hat and coat and I'll show you where the boat's hidden."

The girls entered the shack, glancing about with more than casual interest. It was quite bare of furniture, but was much cleaner than they had expected. A cot occupied one side of the room; there were two chairs, a desk, a battered table with a drawer, a small chest, and a cook stove. The walls were lined with built-in shelves, scantily stocked with groceries. A pair of snowshoes, a rack of books, and a bear skin completed the wall decoration.

Mr. Jay placed the cake in a covered box, and took his hat and jacket from one of the nails behind the door. Then, calling his dog, he bade the girls follow him to the waterfront. Halfway to the shore they met Marshmallow and Dave, who by this time had rounded up their fishing tackle and bait.

The old man led them to an old log which was nearly hidden by overhanging tree branches. The boat was chained to the log, and after unlocking the padlock, he handed Dave the key.

"I wish you'd fasten it again when you get through fishing," he requested. "The boys here-

abouts cause me trouble sometimes. They seem to think it's smart to set my boat adrift."

"We'll take good care of it," Dave promised Mr. Jay.

"How are you fixed for bait?"

"We have a plug, some worms and minnows," Marshmallow informed him.

Mr. Jay took a queer feathered object from his pocket and offered it to the youths.

"I don't know whether you go in much for artificial bait or not, but I've found this jigger mighty useful. For some reason the fish rise to it, when they won't touch another bait."

"Why, thanks," Dave stammered, taken by surprise at the old man's generosity.

"I guess you have everything you need," Mr. Jay went on quietly, tossing the anchor rope into the bottom of the boat. "Be careful you don't upset!"

Without waiting to see the young people off, he turned and walked hurriedly back to his cabin.

"Say, he doesn't act very miserly!" Marshmallow burst out after the old man was lost to view. "He's given us his boat and everything. Guess the townsfolk were crazy when they called him a miser."

"I thought he was aloof at first," Doris added, "but he seems to want to be friendly with us. He looked so grateful when we took him that cake."

"I'll bet he doesn't get enough to eat," Marshmallow declared.

The fishing tackle and the minnow bucket were loaded into the boat, and the girls took their places. Marshmallow and Dave pushed off and assumed the burden of rowing. The boat skimmed lightly over the water. Crossing to the far shore, the party dropped anchor and Doris, Marshmallow, and Dave brought out their rods. Kitty refused to take a hand but sat contentedly in the middle of the boat, watching the ripples on the water.

Apparently the fish were not in a hungry mood, for they declined to partake of the appetizing bait which was dangled before them. After perhaps half an hour Marshmallow hauled in the anchor and the party moved on to another spot.

Scarcely had Doris dropped her line over the side of the boat, when she felt a sharp tug. A large fish flashed out of the water like a streak of silver, and the battle was on. Marshmallow and Dave had no time to offer advice, for very shortly they, too, were rewarded with strikes. Kitty squealed with delight and nervous dread, as fish after fish was neatly landed.

"We have a dozen nice ones now," Dave observed presently, surveying the string. "What do you say we journey homeward?"

The others were beginning to tire under the hot sun, and the thought of luncheon made them will-

ing to end the sport for the day. Marshmallow seized the oars and struck out for the distant shore. After he had rowed steadily for ten minutes, the sweat trickled from his forehead, but still the shore appeared as far away as ever.

"This old boat doesn't make much headway," he puffed, resting on his oars.

"You might go faster, if you'd take up the anchor!" Doris laughed.

"Jumping toads! Have I been hauling that rock all this time? No wonder I thought the boat was heavy."

Sheepishly Marshmallow hauled in the anchor and again took up the oars. This time the boat shot smoothly across the water.

"What shall we do with all these fish?" Dave questioned, as he helped Doris alight a few minutes later. "We can't eat them all."

"Let's take Mr. Jay a few," she suggested. "He gave us the boat and we owe it to him."

While the boys were making the craft fast to the log, Doris and Kitty took four of the largest fish to the cabin. They found the so-called miser sitting outside the door, smoking his pipe with the indolent ease of one who did not have a care in the world. He politely arose as the girls came up, and after a slight hesitation accepted the fish which they offered him. Yet, as before, it seemed difficult for him to put his appreciation into words.

"Keep the padlock key," he insisted, "and use the boat any time you like."

The girls did not remain to talk, for they saw that their presence embarrassed him.

"You can tell that the man once knew a better life," Doris said in a low tone, as they went back to the shore to join their friends. "Did you notice how he instinctively arose, when we came up?"

"Yes, and that wasn't all I noticed. Doris, he's especially interested in you."

"What makes you think so?"

"He keeps looking at you in such a queer, intent way."

"Oh, I guess that's just his way," Doris passed it off.

They found Marshmallow and Dave waiting for them on the path, and the four made their way to the cabin. As they approached, they caught the appetizing odor of meat cooking.

"Guess Ma didn't have any confidence in our ability to bring back a mess of fish," Marshmallow laughed. "I sure am hungry!"

"So say we all of us," echoed Dave.

"Fish are all right to eat," Kitty added, "but I don't like the idea of putting them into my mouth so soon after they're caught. I kind of want to forget the struggle of the poor things for a little while, before cooking them."

The others laughed.

Marshmallow was in the lead, and held the door of the cabin open for the girls to enter.

Doris walked in and then stopped short.

There sat Ollie Weiser!

CHAPTER XVI

A PROMISE

As the young people entered the cabin, Ollie Weiser quickly arose from the chair, his face brightening at the sight of Doris.

"Oh," she gasped, "I didn't expect you. This is—this is Mr. Mallow, and Mr. Chamberlin. May I present Mr. Weiser?"

The two boys and the unwanted visitor acknowledged the introduction.

"I was just telling Mrs. Mallow my troubles," he said with an apologetic smile. "It looks as though I'm in real difficulties now. That's what I came out here to see you about, Miss Force."

"I don't know how I can help you."

"They're threatening me with jail. All because I happened to light a few matches."

"Tell us the truth," Mrs. Mallow commanded. "Did you accidentally set the hotel on fire?"

The magician shook his head, and was such a picture of abject misery, that they could not doubt his honesty.

"On my word of honor, I don't know how the fire started. I'm sure I had nothing to do with it."

"Surely they can't prove anything against you,"

Doris declared, somewhat moved in spite of her dislike for the man.

"One of the hotel guests swore he saw me moving about with suspicious lights. To make it worse, they've discovered that I sold my snakes. They claim they have a clear case against me. After we left here yesterday, they took me to McDermott's office. The old scalawag grilled me, until I didn't know whether I was coming or going."

"You didn't confess anything?" Doris asked anxiously.

"There wasn't anything to tell. I had a mind to make up some sort of story just to end the interview, but I didn't."

"Perhaps you won't hear any more about it," Kitty suggested.

Ollie laughed unpleasantly.

"Oh, they intend to make it hot for me, all right. There's no chance they'll let the matter drop. McDermott is only waiting until he can get more evidence against me. The dirty crook!"

"But if you didn't do it—" Dave interposed.

The magician cut him short.

"That won't make the slightest difference to Morehouse and that lawyer. They've decided to put the blame on me, and unless I move fast, they'll do it, too! I came out here to ask if you won't help me, Miss Force."

Doris looked nonplused. She really believed

his story, but she did not wish to become involved in an unpleasant affair.

"Why, I don't see what I can do," she protested.

"You can speak a good word for me. You will, won't you?"

Doris hesitated and then said reluctantly:

"Yes, I'll do anything I can for you."

With an impulsive gesture the magician caught her hand and pressed it gratefully. Dave scowled.

"You'll never regret helping me," Ollie cried. "If ever I can return the favor, just call on me."

Doris was greatly relieved when he left a few minutes later. Dave looked as though he could cheerfully have kicked the magician out of the door, but he restrained his feelings until Ollie disappeared.

"What right has he to come here with his troubles?" Dave demanded. "I don't like the fellow. I wish you hadn't promised to help him, Doris."

"What could I do, Dave? He hasn't a single friend in Cloudy Cove and you know that McDermott is probably an unscrupulous lawyer. I didn't want to be drawn into the case, but I do feel sorry for Mr. Weiser."

Dave wisely permitted the matter to drop, though it was obvious that he was a bit jealous of the magician. Doris pretended not to notice this and hoped that he would be sensible. It seemed

ridiculous to her that Dave could consider Ollie a rival. She regretted her promise, yet she could not bring herself to the point of ignoring it. Fairness demanded that she aid the magician if possible.

Monday morning brought a more important problem—the affairs of her late Uncle John Trent. Promptly at the appointed hour Doris presented herself at the bank. As she waited outside the President's private office, she nervously considered her mission. So much depended upon what Mr. Cooke could tell her! If he were unable to furnish her with vital information, then the trip to Cloudy Cove would be a failure.

"Mr. Cooke will see you now," she was informed by a stenographer.

She followed the girl to the inner office. Mr. Cooke, a well-dressed, stout gentleman of youthful appearance, arose and politely offered Doris a chair. The stenographer withdrew.

"What may I do for you, Miss Force?" the President inquired.

Doris forgot her shyness and plunged into her story. She told of the mysterious disappearance of her Uncle John Trent many years before, and how Joe Jeffery, the noted criminal, had endeavored to pass himself off as a son of the deceased man. She ended by explaining that Jeffery had not made a complete confession, but had told her

to go to Cloudy Cove, where she would learn all about the Estate of her uncle.

"John Trent," the banker spoke thoughtfully. "The name isn't familiar to me."

"Then you can't help me?" Doris questioned, struggling to hide her disappointment. "I was under the impression that my uncle once had a safe deposit box in this bank."

"It's barely possible," Mr. Cooke agreed. "I'll have one of the clerks bring the records."

He pressed a button on his desk, and when his secretary appeared, requested her to send Mr. Whitefeld to him with the data.

"Perhaps there is someone on your staff who might remember my uncle," Doris suggested hopefully, while they were waiting for the clerk. "He must have lived here at Cloudy Cove for many years."

The President shook his head regretfully.

"The bank has been entirely reorganized since the date you mention. Our employees are comparatively new to the institution. I am afraid there is no one working here now who would remember your uncle's account."

After a brief wait the clerk appeared with the required records and placed the sheets before the President. He scanned them for some time in silence. When Doris had almost given up hope, he glanced up with a smile.

"How stupid of me not to recall the name when you mentioned it. I find by the records that your uncle did have an account in this bank years ago. What will interest you more, I find he did rent a safe deposit box from us."

"What was the last date that the rent was paid?" Doris questioned eagerly.

The banker glanced at the sheet before him.

"The rent has been paid to date."

"To date? What do you mean?" Doris asked. "My uncle is dead."

"It has been paid by a lawyer named McDermott."

"McDermott! Why should he pay the rent on the box?"

"Perhaps he has charge of your late uncle's Estate. I advise you to consult him. It is possible he can aid you in establishing your claim to the fortune."

"I shall go to see him at once. How long has he been paying the box rent?"

"For twelve years. Rather odd, I admit, but there must be some clause in the will."

Since the President could offer no further advice or information, Doris thanked him for his assistance and arose to depart. Mr. Cooke escorted her to the outside office.

"Call on me again, if I can be of any service," he invited politely.

Once out in the street Doris reflected upon what she had just learned. Of one thing she was assured: her uncle did have a safe deposit box there at the bank, and in the years since his disappearance no one had come forward to claim the inheritance.

"I can't understand why McDermott is paying the box rent," she thought. "I'd feel a lot better, if he weren't mixed up in it. It's unfortunate that we took a dislike to each other so early in the game. I suppose that now he won't put himself out to help me."

CHAPTER XVII

A DISCOURAGING DAY

DETERMINED to let no grass grow under her feet, Doris made her way to the office of Frank McDermott. She was greeted condescendingly by a highly rouged and over-powdered stenographer, who informed her that the lawyer was out of the city.

"Any message?" the girl demanded bluntly.

Doris said that she would call later, and left the building more discouraged than ever. She felt that she had made the right start, yet she realized that the task of settling her uncle's Estate was not going to be an easy one. It might be several days before she could see McDermott, and she had already wasted a great deal of time.

Doris glanced at her wrist watch and saw that she still had three-quarters of an hour before it would be time to meet Dave, who had promised to drive her back to the camp. After a moment's debate she turned her steps toward the old Mayfair hotel.

"I ought to find Mr. Morehouse somewhere around the place," she told herself.

As she approached the wrecked building, she

saw several men examining the ruins, apparently estimating the damage. She recognized the hotel-owner and went over to him.

"Well, what's wanted?" he inquired bluntly.

It occurred to Doris that now, being no longer a hotel guest, Morehouse considered it unnecessary to be polite.

"I came to talk to you about Ollie Weiser," she began. "I'm sure he didn't set fire to your hotel."

"What can you know about it?"

"I awoke at the first alarm and I chanced to glance out of the window. I could see flames spurting up from below and I'm sure they weren't coming from Ollie Weiser's room."

"Humph!" Morehouse grunted. "I guess you're a friend of his."

"Not particularly, but I like to see justice done, and it doesn't seem to me you're giving him a fair deal!"

"Let me tell you a thing or two, young lady." The hotel-keeper faced Doris squarely. "You can't do that man any good by trying to interfere. We're going to have a thorough investigation. My summer business is ruined. It will cost me several thousand dollars to repair the building. Someone is going to pay!"

"You'll have a difficult time getting the money from Weiser," Doris laughed.

"That's all right. I've got to have a clean slate

with the insurance company before they'll pay my claim."

"Oh, I see," Doris said sweetly. "You want to make Weiser responsible! I don't suppose it has occurred to you that defective wiring or a poor flue may have been the cause of the fire? You will recall that it occurred about the time the fires are started for breakfast."

"No such thing!" Morehouse snapped. "I say the fire started in that magician's room and I'll prove it, too!"

"That remains to be seen," Doris retorted, hastily retreating, for she observed that the hotel-keeper was thoroughly aroused at her suggestion. "However, I warn you that unless you conduct a fair investigation, I'll have a word to say to the fire inspectors."

She hurried away, fearful lest she create a scene. The hotel-man stood glaring after her.

"Oh, dear," Doris thought as she walked on down the street, "I'm afraid I've made another enemy. At least, I've kept my promise to Weiser and I've done my best to help him, so my conscience is clear."

She had agreed to meet Dave in front of the public library, and as it was nearly time for him to appear, walked leisurely in that direction, pausing occasionally to gaze at the shop windows. Passing the offices of the Cloudy Cove Sightseeing Bus

Company she would have gone by without glancing in, but a rap on the window attracted her attention. Turning, she beheld Ollie Weiser.

Rushing to the door, he greeted her enthusiastically, asking her inside, an invitation Doris declined.

"What are you doing here?" she inquired curiously.

"I'm a member of the firm now," Ollie informed her proudly. "Got the job this morning. All I have to do is meet the prospective suckers and feed 'em a line about the beauty spots of Cloudy Cove."

"I'm very glad you have found a position," Doris returned politely.

"I took your advice, but I'll admit I'm not so crazy about the work. Pretty tame after being on the road. Now, if you would just agree to help me with that act I was telling you about! We'd just give this burg the merry ha ha and set forth to make our fortunes."

"You paint a very glowing picture."

"Why not do it? We'd make a real team!"

"I beg your pardon," a cold voice said just behind them.

Doris turned and saw Dave. She had not heard him drive up. By the stony expression on his face she knew that he was displeased at finding her with Ollie Weiser.

"Ready to go?" he asked in a tone which he tried to make sound unperturbed.

"Yes," Doris replied with a smile. "I was just on my way to meet you."

Dave helped her into the car, but said not a word as he started the engine. Usually he was a careful driver, but today he coursed down the streets with almost reckless abandon. They reached the outskirts of Cloudy Cove and still he did not speak.

"What's the matter, Dave?" Doris asked softly.

"Nothing."

"Surely you don't think I really like that magician?"

"He's always hanging around, isn't he?"

"That isn't my fault, Dave," Doris protested.

"You could tell him to be on his way."

"I just happened to meet him today. He was telling me about his new position."

"Of course it's no affair of mine! If you like a handsome snake-charmer better than you do me—"

"Oh, Dave, you silly thing! What is the matter with you, anyway? I've told you before I don't like him."

Mollified, Dave tried to smile. Reaching in his pocket he brought forth a letter and dropped it into Doris's lap.

"It came on the last mail. I forgot all about it."

Relieved that the disagreement was at an end,

Doris ripped open the envelope. The letter was from the Misses Gates. It was three pages long, but contained no information that would assist in settling up John Trent's Estate.

"I had hoped the Misses Gates might have learned something more from Joe Jeffery," Doris commented, as she folded the letter.

Dave did not answer. Doris glanced quickly at him, but his face was a mask, betraying no emotion. He paid strict attention to his driving and sent the car down the road faster than Doris would have wished. However, she refrained from reproving him.

"He's jealous of Ollie," she told herself. "That's what's the matter!"

Doris was tired and discouraged. Moreover, she was in no mood to try to draw Dave out of his sulking. It seemed to her that everything had gone wrong that morning. The knowledge that Frank McDermott was involved in her Uncle John Trent's affairs disturbed her more than she dared to admit. Several days would probably elapse before she could talk with him, and time was precious. She could not expect Mrs. Mallow to remain at Cloudy Cove longer than two weeks. Her affairs must be settled up in that time, and yet, if things were to go wrong all the time, how could she accomplish it?

Her talk with the hotel-keeper had been most

unpleasant. Not only had she made him angry, but she had entangled herself in Ollie Weiser's affairs. There was nothing she could do now but see the matter through to the end. The magician, too, had irritated her. He was so persistent in his attentions! And now Dave. Why, of all days, must he choose this one in which to become moody?

She was relieved when they drove in at the camp and stopped near the cabin. Dave politely helped her from the car and then vanished.

"What's become of him?" Kitty inquired, as she came out of the cabin. "I wanted to ask him to get a bucket of water from the spring."

"Oh, he's sulking," Doris returned with a tired sigh. "Jealous over Ollie Weiser, if you can imagine that!"

Kitty laughed, but quickly became sober as she observed that her chum was really distressed over the situation.

"Don't bother about him," she advised. "He'll get over it. Sometimes I almost wish I could make Marshmallow a bit jealous."

Doris smiled at the thought of anyone disturbing Marshall's serenity, but almost immediately the smile faded.

"You're terribly discouraged, aren't you, dear?" Kitty murmured sympathetically. "I know you must have had a disappointing day."

"I'm all right," Doris protested. "I just found

out I won't be able to do much about the Estate for a few days."

"That's too bad," Kitty returned, then suddenly brightened. "That will give us a chance to play around. I'll tell you what! It will serve Dave right, too, for not being more sensible. We'll slip away tomorrow morning and go fishing. Maybe Mr. Jay will go with us!"

It was not so much the prospect of a fishing trip as it was the thought that the Miser of Cloudy Cove might be induced to accompany them, that made Doris agree to the plan. She had no desire to punish Dave, but she did have a great curiosity to talk once more with the mysterious Mr. Jay.

CHAPTER XVIII

CAUGHT IN A STORM

MR. JAY announced that he would be very glad to accompany the girls on a fishing trip the following morning. Doris and Kitty were abroad shortly after four o'clock. They smiled as they stole quietly by the cabin where Dave and Marshmallow were still peacefully sleeping, thinking how surprised and disappointed the boys would be when they learned that they had been left behind.

Upon reaching the beach they found Mr. Jay waiting for them. He had already unfastened the boat and had put in the fishing tackle and bait bucket.

"Looks like a good morning for fish," he observed, as they came up.

Kitty and Doris took seats in the boat and the old miser pushed off from shore. Seizing the oars, he struck out for the far shore, rowing with rhythmical ease. The girls drew their jackets closer about them, for the morning chill was still on the cove and an unpleasant mist hung low over the water.

"It's usually like this early in the morning," Mr. Jay explained in response to the girls' ques-

tions. "As soon as the sun comes up, she'll clear away."

With that he fell silent, paying strict attention to his rowing. Doris and Kitty were too sleepy to chat, so they, too, lapsed into a moody contemplation of the distant shore. Presently Doris became aware that the miser was studying her face intently again. As she turned toward Mr. Jay, he quickly looked away.

"Why does he stare at me so?" she asked herself. "Of whom is it that I remind him?"

Upon impulse she put this thought into the form of a question.

"I—I beg your pardon," the miser mumbled. "I was just looking—that is, my mind was a blank."

Doris did not press the matter further, yet she was more firmly convinced than ever that Mr. Jay had been studying her face. Had he not mentioned that she resembled someone he once knew?

She could think of a dozen questions that she would like to ask the man, curious questions about his past and why he had chosen to live the life of a hermit. Yet she felt that the miser's apparent desire for secrecy must be respected. His past was his own. She had no right to pry into his private affairs.

In spite of Mr. Jay's appearance, Doris was convinced that he was an educated man. His speech

was good and his manners those of a gentleman. She had noticed that the books in his cabin were anything but frivolous.

"Well, here we are," Mr. Jay announced, breaking in upon her thoughts.

Anchoring off a promising-looking spot, they began to try their luck at fishing. For some reason Doris had lost most of her enthusiasm for the sport, yet it really was a pleasure to her to see Mr. Jay cast with unerring precision.

The sun rose higher over the water and, as the miser had predicted, the mist gradually disappeared. The sky cleared, save for a few dark clouds near the horizon, but the air seemed sultry. Before the party had been out an hour the wind died.

"Fish'll probably stop biting now," Mr. Jay complained, scowling at the smooth surface of the water.

After a few minutes he proposed that they change to a new location. As they rowed slowly up the channel, Kitty sat in the back of the boat, gently moving the troll line to and fro. Suddenly she felt a hard tug on the line.

"Stop!" she cried. "The hook's caught on the bottom!"

"Caught nothing!" Mr. Jay returned. "You've hooked a fish. Now land him yourself."

Kitty gave a squeal of terror, for it was her first

fish. At the miser's command she endeavored to reel in, but it required all of her strength. When at length she brought the fish to the side of the boat, she would have lost it, had not the others come to her aid.

"Mercy me!" she exclaimed as she beheld her catch. "He must weigh all of six pounds!"

"A nice one," Mr. Jay smiled, "but I'd say it would weigh nearer three."

"I believe I might get so I'd like fishing," Kitty went on, not at all crushed by the correction. "That is, if I don't have to bait a hook or take the fish off."

After that she was induced to try her luck with a pole, Mr. Jay attending to the unpleasant detail of bait. The morning passed quickly. The girls were so absorbed that they did not notice that the sky had become partially overcast.

"There's going to be a storm," the miser observed, scanning the horizon anxiously. "I think we'd better be getting back home, if we don't want to get wet."

He pulled up the anchor and slid into his place at the oars. The opposite shore was fully a half mile away, and as they headed for it, Doris wondered if they could beat the storm, for it was rolling up quickly. Already the water had taken on an inky hue.

"Storms come up without much warning here at

Cloudy Cove," the miser muttered, pulling steadily at the oars. "We'll have a close race."

The little boat fairly leaped through the water, causing tiny waves to lap high up against the bow. At first Kitty and Doris did not notice that their feet were resting in an inch of water, and when they became aware of it, they assumed that the waves had washed over the side. A few minutes later Doris realized that the water had crept higher in the bottom of the boat.

"The boat's sprung a leak!" she cried.

The miser nodded grimly.

"I noticed it right off, but I didn't want to alarm you, if I could help it. The water's not coming in very fast. We'll make shore, but I'm afraid you girls will have to bail."

Doris seized the minnow bucket and began scooping water with frantic haste. Although the old man had spoken reassuringly, she felt that the danger was more grave than he cared to have them realize. Kitty found a tin can under the seat, and while it was not worth a great deal, she did her best to help bail. In spite of their efforts the water seeped into the boat faster than they could pour it out.

"We're sinking!" Kitty panted, without letting up on her work.

"Don't be frightened," Mr. Jay said calmly. "We'll make it, if the storm doesn't strike us."

As she bailed, Doris scarcely dared glance at the sky, so ominous had it become. The wind, which had steadily freshened, suddenly descended upon the tiny craft, sending huge waves pounding against it. Water flooded over the side. Doris and Kitty worked madly, feeling that they were fighting a losing battle.

"We're almost there!" Mr. Jay cried encouragingly. "Don't give up!"

A jagged ribbon of lightning illuminated the black sky and for an instant Doris caught a glimpse of the shore ahead. It gave her hope and she bailed with renewed strength.

Then the very clouds seemed to split, pouring down a deluge of rain. Everything was blotted from view, and the girls lost all sense of direction. Would they ever reach shore?

"We've made it!" the miser cried jubilantly a moment later.

At first the girls could see nothing; then gradually they began to distinguish the shoreline. The moment shallow water was reached they stepped from the boat and helped drag it up on the beach.

Without stopping to make the craft fast to the old log, the three set off through the woods at a run. The rain was now coming down in torrents and even the branches of the trees did not afford protection.

"What sights we must be!" Doris gasped.

Scarcely were the words out of her mouth, when there came a dazzling flash of lightning, accompanied by a deafening crash of thunder. So close was the charge, that Doris and Kitty involuntarily halted, huddling together as though for protection.

Before they could express their fright in words, they heard the splitting of a tree limb. Terrified, they gazed upward to see the large branch of an oak falling toward the path!

Kitty emitted a terrified scream, but was too frightened to move. Doris saw at a glance that the falling limb would not strike where the girls were standing, but that Mr. Jay was directly in its path.

"Look out!" she cried frantically.

Too late came the warning. The branch struck the ground with a loud crash, sweeping the old miser beneath the debris!

CHAPTER XIX

A HINT OF THE PAST

As Doris saw the old man fall heavily to the ground, she rushed forward with Kitty close behind her. Frantically they pulled at the branches, trying to reach the miser. He lay on his back, white and motionless.

"Mr. Jay, are you hurt?" Doris cried.

There was no response, no movement of the body.

"Oh, he's been killed!" Kitty wailed. "The limb struck him on the head. I saw it!"

By this time the girls had succeeded in dragging aside the branch. Doris knelt down, unmindful of the rain and mud, and took the old man's limp wrist in her hand. She could feel his pulse; the beat was weak but regular.

"He's still alive," she murmured in relief. "We must get him to the cabin."

It was only a short distance farther down the path, but the girls were not at all sure that they could carry the limp form. As they were trying to lift him from the ground, he revived slightly. They managed to get him to his feet, supporting him on either side.

"Are you badly hurt?" Doris demanded anxiously.

The old man mumbled something, but the words were unintelligible.

"He's stunned," Kitty said. "Thank goodness he wasn't killed."

They half-carried, half-dragged him down the path to the cabin. At their approach the dog came growling at them, but a sharp command from Doris silenced him.

Entering the cabin the girls placed Mr. Jay carefully upon the tiny cot. He groaned and uttered a few words which they could not distinguish. Doris quickly lighted the oil lamp, for it had grown very dark. As its rays fell upon the miser's face, they could see that he was deathly pale; a small gash had been cut in his forehead.

"I'm afraid he is badly hurt," Doris said quietly. "One of us must go for help."

"I'll go," Kitty offered. "I'd be afraid to stay here alone."

She slipped out of the cabin and vanished into the storm. As the door closed behind her, Mr. Jay stirred slightly and groaned again. Doris crossed over to his bedside, trying to arrange the pillows more comfortably.

"Are you in great pain?" she asked.

The old man's eyes fluttered open, but he stared at her without recognition.

Doris removed his wet boots and set a pan of water on the stove to heat. The room was chilly and damp, so she added several sticks to the smoldering coals. When the water was warm, she took a clean cloth and gently bathed Mr. Jay's forehead. She searched the cupboards for antiseptic, but could find nothing. As Mr. Jay became more restless, she took up her vigil at his bedside.

"Don't try to move," she murmured, as the old man tore at the covers. "You must lie still."

Doris glanced nervously toward the door. Why did Kitty not come with aid? Surely she had been gone hours. She felt so helpless. If the man became violent, she feared she could not control him.

She gazed anxiously down at the white face and thought again that Mr. Jay had once been a handsome man. She saw the thin lips move ever so slightly, and bent nearer.

"The Gates—the Gates," she heard him mutter.

Doris placed a soothing hand upon his forehead and for a moment he remained quiet. Then he moved restlessly, plucking at the blankets.

"The ring—" he murmured. "The ring—I have it. I have it with me."

Just at that moment the door opened and Kitty, followed by Mrs. Mallow and Dave, hurried to the bedside. Doris turned in relief to them.

"He's delirious," she said quietly. "I'm afraid his skull may be fractured."

"We've sent Marshall to town for a doctor," Mrs. Mallow told her.

In her competent way she took charge, but there was really nothing more to be done until the doctor arrived. The old miser tossed restlessly several times, but did not speak again.

All were relieved when at last Marshmallow arrived with the physician. Anxiously they awaited the verdict. After a brief examination the doctor declared that Mr. Jay had only been stunned and in a short time would be as well as before. He dressed the head wound and soon took his departure, but not until the miser had recovered sufficiently to sit up.

"Mr. Jay, you must come up to our cabin, where we can look after you properly," Mrs. Mallow insisted.

The old man shook his head, forcing a smile.

"Thank you, but I am quite all right now. I was only stunned. I feel as fit as a fiddle."

"Marshmallow and I will stay with you, then," Dave offered.

"There's no need." To demonstrate that he had regained his strength, Mr. Jay arose and walked halfway across the room.

In spite of his protests Mrs. Mallow and the others insisted upon remaining until after he had

partaken of his noonday meal. Then they reluctantly left, determining, however, to keep close watch of the cabin during the day. Mr. Jay was profuse in his thanks for what they had done, particularly expressing his gratitude to Kitty and Doris.

"I think we owe our lives to you," Doris returned gravely. "We never would have reached shore, if you hadn't been along."

Again the Old Miser of Cloudy Cove gave Doris that long, searching look which had made her feel uncomfortable on other occasions. To direct attention away from herself, Doris said:

"Perhaps Mr. Jay would like to rest for a while all alone. We better go."

The elderly man looked grateful, and was profuse in his thanks. "It was very kind of you people to take so much trouble."

"We hope to do so again," Doris added.

Leaving the cabin, Dave fell into step with her, and the two lagged a short distance behind the others. The rain had ceased to fall and the sun was showing signs of breaking through the scattered clouds.

"I've been an awful chump!" Dave began accusingly. "I'm very sorry for the way I acted."

"You mean about Ollie Weiser?" Doris asked, smiling.

"Yes, I know it was silly to be jealous, but I

couldn't help it. When you and Kitty were out there on the water and that storm came up so suddenly—well, you'll never know how worried I was!"

"Really?" Doris demanded, rather thrilled at the tender note which had crept into Dave's voice. She decided it would not do to allow him to become sentimental, so she deftly changed the subject. "Well, Kitty and I were worried, too, but Mr. Jay was a wonder. It was due to him that we reached shore safely. You know, I like that man more every day. There's something about him that makes me feel sure he must have had a fascinating past."

Dave was not interested in Mr. Jay at the moment, but when Doris had that far-away look in her eyes he knew it was useless to attempt to talk personalities. At least he felt assured that he had been forgiven.

"When I was waiting for help to come, I distinctly heard Mr. Jay say, 'The ring. I have it with me.' What do you think he could have meant by that?"

"Search me," Dave returned, lapsing into slang. "Probably just nonsense. Or perhaps it was some ring he bought."

"I wish I knew."

"I shouldn't worry about it, if I were you. What he said probably has no significance. You'd

better hurry to the cabin now and change your wet clothing or you'll catch a bad cold."

Doris permitted the subject to drop, and did not mention it again that day. Yet the time was to come when the significance of those strangely muttered words was to force itself upon her consciousness.

CHAPTER XX

DAVE AND MARSHMALLOW

TRUE to the doctor's prediction, Mr. Jay was soon up and about. Several times during the day Doris or one of the others dropped in at his cabin, but as these calls seemed to bother him, they gave up trying to be of service.

"I think he's fully recovered, anyway," Mrs. Mallow declared. "He doesn't like to have us make a fuss over him, so we had better stay away."

Dave and Marshmallow remained close to camp, scarcely permitting the girls out of their sight. The former completely forgot his jealousy, and Marshmallow was particularly attentive to Kitty.

Late in the afternoon Silas Baker called to inquire if everything was satisfactory at the camp, and was impressed with the story of the narrow escape which the girls had experienced.

"It's not often that Mr. Jay is caught out in a storm," he informed them. "That man knows more about weather than any other person I ever knew. He should at that, having lived on this cove for so many years."

"How many?" Doris asked curiously.

"Now bless me, I've forgotten. When I bought

this piece of ground he was living in that same cabin."

"When was it you purchased the camp?" Kitty inquired.

"It must have been six years ago. No, I've had it longer than that."

"I wonder if by any chance he could have known my uncle?" Doris questioned.

Mr. Baker looked blank.

"Your uncle?"

"Don't you remember I told you about him?" Doris reminded him a trifle impatiently. "My Uncle John Trent."

"Oh, yes, yes," Mr. Baker said hastily. "It's barely possible he might know something about him. Mr. Jay is a quiet sort, but when you get him to talking, he seems to have an amazing knowledge of Cloudy Cove."

"The problem is to get him to talk."

"Yes, but if he takes a fancy to you, he'll likely tell you anything you want to know. Folks talk against him quite a bit around here, but it's because they don't really know him. I've always found Mr. Jay to be a kind and generous man."

After her conversation with Mr. Baker, Doris was determined to interview the miser at the first opportunity. She would have returned to the cabin late that afternoon, but she felt it would not be fair to trouble Mr. Jay so soon after his acci-

dent. At supper time Mrs. Mallow sent her son to invite him to dine with them, but Marshmallow returned to say that the old man had already eaten.

"Didn't look like he had much, either," he added.

"I'm afraid he's very proud," Mrs. Mallow said, frowning slightly. "I wonder if someone ought not to stay with him tonight?"

"I offered," Marshmallow informed her, "but he said he wouldn't think of it. Anyway, he has only the one cot, so I don't see how I could have stayed, unless I'd wanted to sleep on the floor."

"He seemed all right when you left?"

"Sure. That rap on the head just stunned him for a few minutes. He'll be O. K. by himself, but he promised that if he should need help, he'd send that hound of his."

While Doris and her friends disliked to leave Mr. Jay alone, his desire for isolation made it difficult for them to help him. The morning's adventure had convinced the girls that the old miser was the master of his environment; sufficient unto himself, he took life as he found it, asking no favors and expecting to give few in return. Yet, if Doris and Kitty had been drawn a bit closer to him, they actually knew no more about him than before. His past life remained a closed book.

"I wonder if he could have known my uncle?" Doris asked herself. "It would mean so much to

me, if he could furnish me with the information I must have! Since coming to Cloudy Cove I've made very little progress. Luck has been against me!"

Doris did not really believe in luck. For that reason she determined to investigate every thread which offered the slightest hope of leading to her goal. Twice she had called at Frank McDermott's office, only to be informed that the lawyer was still out of the city. Until he returned, there was nothing to do but mark time.

"It's barely possible Mr. Jay may know something of interest, having lived here so many years," she told herself. "Since I'm not making much headway as it is, I certainly can't waste my time talking with him. At least, I can be sure he won't discuss my business affairs with others when he is so secretive about his own."

Doris was abroad early the next morning, but Kitty, who had caught a slight cold from the previous day's exposure, announced her intention of sleeping until noon. Marshmallow and Dave appeared at the cabin for breakfast at the usual hour of eight.

"We're going to town just as soon as we eat," Marshmallow announced, more excited than usual. "Want to go along, Doris?"

"I can't get ready as soon as that. Why the rush?"

"There's a flying circus coming in this morning. We saw the posters tacked up along the road. Dave has an itch to meet the pilots and exchange yarns with them. He thinks if we get there early, we may get a free plane ride."

"But you've both been up any number of times."

"Dave has, but I haven't had a ride in a year. Better come along, Dory."

"I'd like to, but I simply can't leave for a couple of hours."

"We can wait—" Dave began, but Doris, seeing the disappointed look in his eyes, quickly interrupted.

"No, I know you're eager to get there early, so go on without me. I have several things which I must do before I leave. If I should decide to go later in the morning, I can probably find someone here at the camp who is driving in."

"Marshall, you be careful if you plan to fly in any of those planes!" Mrs. Mallow cautioned. "I'll be uneasy every moment you're gone."

"Now, Ma, don't start worrying," Marshmallow said impatiently. "Flying is safe enough these days."

"If the plane is a good one and the pilot knows his stuff," Dave added with a grin.

After the young men had departed in the old car, Doris helped Mrs. Mallow with the dishes. As she tidied the living room, she tried to think of a

pretext for calling on the old miser, for that was the real business which she had in mind.

"Doris, would you mind taking a custard over to Mr. Jay?" Mrs. Mallow called from the kitchen. "It's just out of the oven and I think he might like it. What Marshall said about him not having enough to eat has worried me."

"Of course I'll take it."

As soon as the dish was wrapped in a paper, she set out through the woods to the cabin. She did not see the miser or his dog anywhere about the premises and so quickened her step, fearing that he might be ill. The cabin door was closed and she rapped firmly upon it. When there was no response, she knocked again, louder than before.

"I wonder if anything can be the matter?" she thought anxiously.

Again she rapped and then listened intently. She could hear no sound from within. After an instant's hesitation she turned the knob and gently pushed the door open. One glance about the room disclosed the fact that Mr. Jay was not there. However, she saw that the bed had been made that morning, the floor swept, and the breakfast dishes neatly stacked on the kitchen table.

"He must have taken his dog and gone for a walk," Doris assured herself.

She was relieved not to find him confined to his bed, yet disappointed that he was gone. Her talk

must wait. After placing the custard where he would be certain to see it upon his return, she walked slowly back toward her own cabin. She paused to look hopefully up and down the beach, but Mr. Jay was not in sight. Nor did she find him anywhere about the camp.

"I wonder where he could have gone?" she asked herself thoughtfully. "He usually stays close about the place."

Kitty was awake when she returned to the cabin, having just finished a belated breakfast. She spoke a trifle hoarsely, but otherwise appeared not to have suffered from the previous day's adventure.

"Mr. Baker was here while you were away," Mrs. Mallow told Doris. "The poor man is in a frightful mix-up now."

"What has he forgotten this time?"

"Oh, another mistake about tenants. He rented one cabin to two parties, and as luck had it they both arrived at the same time. He's trying to straighten it out now, but both claim the cottage which faces the cove."

"I wonder if he's going back to Cloudy Cove soon?"

"I shouldn't be surprised."

"Let's go with him, if he'll take us, Kitty!" Doris cried impulsively. "We can meet Dave and Marshmallow at the air circus."

"Suits me. There's nothing to do around here

save swim, and I don't dare go in the water with this cold."

The girls rushed off to find Mr. Baker. They hailed him just as he was stepping into his automobile.

"Of course I'll take you," he assured them gaily. "Get your bonnets."

As the three rode toward Cloudy Cove, he told them of the trials which beset the owner of a summer camp. He gave a vivid account of his encounters with the unreasonable tenants, ridiculing himself for the trouble he had caused.

"There's one thing I never forget," he chuckled, "and that's to collect the rent. In fact, I've been known to try to collect two times!"

Mr. Baker offered to take the girls directly to the fair grounds, where the flying circus was to stage its exhibition, but Kitty had a few knick-knacks to purchase, so they asked to be taken to the shopping district.

After Kitty had made her purchases they walked slowly toward the exhibition grounds. The circus was not scheduled to start until afternoon, but two planes could be seen flying high above the fair grounds.

"I wonder if Dave and Marshmallow are up?" Doris murmured. "They'll be disappointed, if they don't get a free ride."

The girls were so absorbed in watching the two

airplanes that they nearly ran into a man who was approaching from the opposite direction.

"I beg your pardon," Doris said quickly, and then laughed. "Why, Mr. Jay! I didn't recognize you in your new suit!"

"Time I was getting one," the old miser muttered, obviously pleased that Doris had noticed his improved appearance.

He still wore old shoes and a shapeless hat, but as he removed the latter the girls observed that his hair had been carefully groomed.

"When I found you had gone away this morning, I was somewhat worried," Doris declared. "You're feeling all right again?"

"Never felt better in my life."

The three chatted together for a few minutes, Mr. Jay appearing unusually at ease. Doris told him of the custard which she had left at his cabin, and he thanked her, though somewhat awkwardly.

"It goes against his grain to accept favors," Kitty commented, as they walked on again, "and yet he does appreciate everything we do for him. You can tell that."

They continued toward the exhibition grounds, making it a point to avoid passing the office of the sight-seeing bus company where Ollie Weiser was employed. As they drew near they saw a throng of persons hurrying in the same direction. Several

planes could be seen flying overhead, one in particular attracting Doris's attention.

"Look!" she cried, clutching her chum's hand. "Is that plane stunting, or what?"

Even as she asked the question it was answered for her. The plane, which was flying low above the earth, seemed to waver in the air, and to the horror of the girls it plunged nose downward. There was a loud crash as it struck the ground and the wings crumpled like so much paper.

"Dave and Marshmallow!" Doris exclaimed tensely. "What if they—"

She could not finish, for the thought was too horrible.

CHAPTER XXI

A NARROW ESCAPE

CATCHING her chum by the hand, Doris dragged her forward. Swiftly they ran toward the exhibition grounds, each afraid to express the fear that their friends had been injured. Already they could hear the frightened shouts of those who had witnessed the airplane crash.

"Dave and Marshmallow just couldn't have been up," Kitty half sobbed. "It would be too terrible!"

"Mrs. Mallow was so sure something would happen," Doris murmured. "She didn't want Marshmallow to fly today."

Other persons were running toward the scene of the accident, but the girls, in their anxiety to learn the worst, outdistanced nearly everyone. They reached the gate all but winded and were forced to slacken their speed. Doris caught sight of a small boy who apparently had been on the grounds for some time, and called to him:

"Was anyone—killed?"

"Don't know," the youngster returned, without halting. "Two young men from Baker's summer camp were up."

Doris and Kitty exchanged horrified glances. Dave and Marshmallow! There could be no doubt of it.

"Oh!" Kitty gasped, clinging weakly to her chum's arm. "I can't go on! I can't!"

"You must!" Doris commanded tersely, but all color had drained from her face. "There may be some mistake. Perhaps the boy didn't know."

The airplane had fallen not far from the race track, but the girls could not see the wreckage, for hundreds of persons had crowded about the spot. In vain they endeavored to push through.

"We must get to them!" Doris cried frantically.

An ambulance, its siren crying out a warning to those in its path, came rattling through the gate. The crowd was forced to break away.

"Quick!" Doris ordered. "Jump on the running board!"

As the ambulance moved slowly through the crowd, she sprang up on the side, Kitty following her example.

"Hey, get down!" they were sharply ordered.

"Our friends were in that crash!" Doris panted. "We've got to get to them!"

A moment later the ambulance came to an abrupt halt, and the girls dropped off. They steeled themselves for the first glimpse of the wreck. The plane resembled so much kindling wood; the wings had been neatly severed, the pro-

peller smashed, the fuselage crushed in. A man lay groaning on the earth not far away and several persons were endeavoring to lift him.

Doris was afraid to look, yet she must know the worst. She moved nearer until she caught a glimpse of the bruised face. It was neither Marshmallow nor Dave!

Frantically she searched the crowd about the wrecked ship. If the boys had been in the crash, what had become of them? Had they been killed outright?

Suddenly she caught sight of Dave and gave a little cry of joy. At the sound he turned, saw her, and rushed to her side.

"Dave! Dave!" Doris cried, clutching him tightly by the arm. "You're not dead! Oh, I'm so thankful!"

"I'm very much alive," Dave laughed, "and I, too, am thankful. Had a mighty narrow escape."

"Marshmallow!" Kitty exclaimed. "Is he—?"

"Not hurt a particle. He's so roly-poly that when we struck the ground, he just bounced."

"Where is he?"

Even as she spoke, Kitty saw Marshmallow coming toward her. The usual smile had been wiped from his face, but otherwise he appeared very much the same. The clothing of both young men was soiled and torn, and Dave had an ugly scratch across his left cheek.

"Oh, Marshall," Kitty cried anxiously, "when we saw that ambulance we were afraid you had both been killed!"

"Not us," the plump lad returned proudly. "We're too tough to kill."

"The pilot is badly injured?" Doris questioned, shuddering as she saw the ambulance attendants lift him upon the stretcher.

"I don't think so," Dave told her soberly. "His leg is broken and he's badly shaken up, but otherwise he seems to be all right."

"The old crate is sure a wreck, though," Marshmallow observed. "I guess we were lucky to get out the way we did."

"Lucky!" Doris exclaimed. "It was nothing less than a miracle. What happened, anyway?"

"Engine failure," Dave told her. "If I'd been at the controls, I believe I could have brought the plane down safely, but the pilot became excited. Crowds were milling about over the field, and in trying to pick out a landing place he lost control of the ship completely. We just crashed."

"And how!" Marshmallow added slangily. "I think it jarred loose my wisdom tooth."

"Your wisdom tooth!" Kitty chided. "If you had one, you wouldn't have gone up in that plane."

"It was a foolish thing to do," Dave agreed soberly. "I've always known that one takes a risk flying with these barnstormers. I guess I let my

enthusiasm get the best of me. It was my fault entirely."

"No, it wasn't," Marshmallow chimed in. "I thought of the idea."

"At any rate, the ride was expensive at the price, and we didn't pay a cent."

Assured that the pilot was to be taken immediately to the hospital, Doris and her friends hurriedly left the grounds for they did not wish to be annoyed by reporters or curious persons.

"I guess we'd better go home and change clothes," Dave declared, leading the way to the parked car. "Are you girls ready to go back?"

"I am," Kitty announced, clinging anxiously to Marshall's arm. She could not convince herself that he really had escaped unhurt.

Doris hesitated. She had hoped to call again at Frank McDermott's office before returning to the camp. Reading this thought, Dave quickly assured her that if she wished to remain he would return for her in an hour.

"Then if you don't mind, I shall stop to see the lawyer," she said in relief. "My vacation is fast slipping away, and if I don't get busy soon, I'll be forced to return home without my inheritance."

Accordingly, Dave dropped her at McDermott's office, promising that he would not fail to return after he had made himself more presentable. Scarcely had she said goodbye to her friends when

she was startled to hear her name called. Wheeling about, she saw Mr. Baker.

"What are you doing in this end of town?" he demanded pleasantly.

Doris explained her mission, adding that she was somewhat timid about accosting the lawyer.

"I'll go along with you, if you like," the old gentleman volunteered. "I know Frank McDermott, though I'm not proud of the acquaintance. I'll introduce you."

"You did once before," Doris reminded him with a smile.

"So I did. Well, another introduction may not be amiss."

The two entered the office together and Mr. Baker's presence did give Doris more confidence. The stenographer informed her that the lawyer was in and would see her in a few minutes.

After perhaps a quarter of an hour the inside office door swung open, and McDermott stepped out into the waiting room. He greeted Doris pleasantly, and after Mr. Baker had explained that she wished to see him on legal business, escorted her to his private room. Mr. Baker, who had no desire to appear inquisitive, withdrew. Doris would have preferred that he remain, for, while the lawyer was very polite, she felt uneasy in his presence.

Quietly she told her story. Mr. McDermott

made no comment until she had finished, but while she was speaking his eyes bored into her in a most unpleasant manner. Doris felt that he was reading her very thoughts, and perhaps for that reason did not tell him all of the details of the case. She spoke of Joe Jeffery who had been sent to prison for his attempt to cheat the Misses Gates, but made no mention of her interview with the man who was head of the bank.

As she mentioned the criminal's name, she saw a strange expression pass over the lawyer's face, the significance of which was not clear to her.

"So that's why I haven't heard from him lately," McDermott muttered under his breath.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I was just mumbling to myself," the lawyer said, smiling blandly. "A bad habit of mine."

He fell into a moody silence, and after a few moments Doris was forced to remind him of her presence.

"I thought perhaps you could help me clear up the affair, Mr. McDermott. That's why I came to you."

"My dear Miss Force, I shall do all in my power to aid you, but I am afraid I can tell you nothing of your uncle."

Doris looked at him somewhat sharply, almost suspiciously.

"But surely you know of John Trent! Mr.

Cooke at the bank said you had paid the rent on his safe deposit box for years!"

A red glow spread over the lawyer's face, yet he did not lose his composure.

"Oh! Your uncle is John Trent?"

"Certainly. I told you that."

"I misunderstood the name."

"Then you do know something concerning him?"

"What did Mr. Cooke tell you?"

"Very little."

"I fear I can add but little to what you already know. It is true I have paid the rent on the safe deposit box for many years, but it is my honest belief that your uncle is dead."

"Then I'll be able to claim the inheritance?" Doris questioned eagerly.

"Perhaps in time. Mr. Trent came to me years ago and requested me to draw up a will for him. He set aside a fund which was to be used to defray the expense of a safe deposit box. I have not seen your uncle since that day. Naturally, I have met the payments on the box, but the fund is nearly exhausted now."

"Was the will made out in my favor?" Doris demanded.

"Really, I cannot remember. I believe a niece was mentioned."

"Then surely, since my uncle left a will, the Estate can be settled easily."

Mr. McDermott shrugged his shoulders, a gesture which Doris could not understand. She felt that her arrival on the scene had not entirely pleased him.

"It will not be as easy as you anticipate," he said slowly, fingering the penknife on his desk. "There will be a great deal of red tape."

"I know nothing of legal matters," Doris returned. "Surely, I can trust that end to you."

McDermott visibly brightened.

"As I said before, I shall be pleased to help you, but there is the necessary matter of a fee, you know."

"Certainly," Doris responded a bit stiffly. "I anticipated paying for any services rendered."

"There is considerable legal work to be done on this case, Miss Force. I am afraid I cannot start it unless I have a small payment in advance. Say two hundred dollars."

"Two hundred dollars!" Doris gasped. "That seems a great deal."

"But think of your ultimate gain," Mr. McDermott reminded her shrewdly. "As I mentioned, there is a vast amount of detail work to be done."

"I suppose I can furnish that amount," Doris agreed reluctantly.

She had a small sum of money in her own name, but as it was a reserve fund to be used for her education, she disliked to draw upon it. Still, if she

could not obtain her rightful inheritance without advancing an attorney's fee, it seemed foolish not to use some of her bank balance.

"Oh, yes, there is another little matter," the lawyer continued. "Before you can claim the fortune, you must prove beyond a doubt that your uncle is actually dead."

Doris looked perplexed.

"But how can I do that? No one knows what became of him. Is there no other way to prove my claim?"

"Perhaps I can find a way, but I am afraid it will involve considerable expense."

"If only I could find someone who could tell me of my uncle's life and death, it would simplify matters," Doris commented soberly.

"Yes, indeed," the lawyer agreed with a crafty smile, "but you must have a responsible person with a signed statement to prove your right to proceed and inherit the Estate. Whom do you know?"

Doris could not answer. She knew of no one save Joe Jeffery, who had any knowledge of her uncle's last days, and certainly he could not be classified as a responsible person. She felt baffled, defeated.

Before she could answer the question the lawyer had put to her, the door opened and the stenographer announced that Edgar Morehouse was waiting outside.

"I'll see him in a few minutes," McDermott instructed.

At that moment the hotel-keeper appeared in the doorway, brushing the stenographer aside with an impatient gesture.

"I'm in a hurry, McDermott," he said bluntly. "Sorry to break in, but I can't wait."

Doris was angered at the rude interruption, but she quietly arose and turned to leave. She would have walked past the hotel-keeper without a word, but he blocked the door.

"Wait a minute," he said with a sarcastic curl to his lip. "I have some news about the fire which I am sure you will want to hear."

CHAPTER XXII

EXONERATED

Doris did not respond, but quietly waited for the hotel-keeper to continue.

"It's about that fellow Weiser," Mr. Morehouse began. "I guess maybe we did accuse him unjustly."

"What's that?" McDermott demanded sharply. "Who says we accused him unjustly?"

"Well," Morehouse said lamely, obviously not relishing the story, "the fire inspector went over the hotel building this morning, and his verdict was that the blaze started from a defective flue."

"That's what I thought from the very first," Doris reminded him a trifle complacently, for she had not forgotten how the hotel man had abused her for voicing her opinion. "You now admit that Mr. Weiser is completely exonerated?"

"Well, it looks like it. The inspector said the fire couldn't have started in his room."

Doris, chancing to glance toward the lawyer, was surprised to see that he was scowling. It struck her that the turn affairs had taken did not fit in with his scheme of things. He had deliberately built up a case against the magician, and re-

gardless of the facts, did not wish to have it overthrown.

"I'm very glad to hear the news," Doris commented, turning to leave. "If I see Mr. Weiser, I'll tell him."

The hotel-keeper closed the door after her, apparently in haste to closet himself with McDermott. Doris wondered what business the two were about.

"I'm almost certain that if Morehouse had talked with that lawyer before seeing me, he never would have exonerated Ollie Weiser," she told herself. "I believe McDermott is thoroughly crooked, though I haven't any real reason for thinking so. Oh, dear, I do wish he wasn't handling my affairs."

She left the office, thoughtfully making her way down the street. The interview had taken less time than she had anticipated, so there remained at least fifteen minutes before she could expect Dave to call for her.

"I must kill time some way," she thought, "so while I'm waiting for Dave, I may as well drop around and tell Ollie Weiser the news. It will take a great load off his mind."

Accordingly, she set off for the office of the bus company, which was only a short distance away. Entering, she saw the magician seated at a desk near the window. He nearly upset his chair, so great was his haste to reach her side. Doris did

not waste words, for she did not wish to be seen talking with Weiser. Hastily, she told him what she had just learned.

"They had me in a pretty tight place there for a while," the magician grinned. "You were the only one who believed that I was telling the truth. I owe you everything."

"Not at all. I did speak to Mr. Morehouse in your behalf, but I'm sure my words did not carry much weight with him."

Ollie Weiser would have prolonged the conversation, but Doris, her message delivered, was unwilling to linger. She said goodbye and stepped out into the street again. Just as she emerged from the building, she caught sight of Dave in the car. He was heading toward the lawyer's office, and for one brief instant she hoped he would not see her. However, the next moment, feeling that Dave must judge the situation for himself, she called his name.

"Hello there!" Dave cried, slamming on the brake and bringing the car to a halt at the curbing. "I wasn't looking for you here."

The smile faded from his face, as he became aware that Doris had just emerged from the office of the bus company. He scowled, as Ollie Weiser came to the huge plate-glass window and waved goodbye to her.

"Now, don't look like a thundercloud," Doris

chided as she climbed into the car. "As many a girl has said before: 'I can explain everything.'"

"You know I don't watch your every movement," Dave said reproachfully. "You don't need to explain anything, unless you wish."

"Well, it happens that I want to, Dave." Doris knew that in spite of her friend's words, he found it quite impossible not to be jealous of Weiser, so she felt it would be best to clear up the atmosphere.

"I trust you, Dory. I'm sure you went to that office on urgent business and not to see that—that clumsy, ignorant, brazen—"

"Never mind the rest of the adjectives," Doris interrupted, half-laughing. "As a matter of fact, I went there to see Ollie Weiser."

"You did?" A hurt look flashed over Dave's face.

"Yes, I wanted to tell him that Morehouse has exonerated him of all blame in connection with the fire. I knew he'd want to hear it."

"Oh!" Dave smiled again. "That's different. It was mighty decent of you to take the trouble."

"I thought you would see it that way."

Doris was relieved that he had not misinterpreted her motive in calling upon the magician; but then, she had known Dave was fair-minded. It was only because he liked her so much that he was troubled with jealousy. She was very fond of

Dave, too. If anything had happened to him in the airplane accident—but she resolutely forced the thought from her mind.

"How are you feeling?" she questioned anxiously. "Don't you think perhaps you had better see a doctor? It's possible you may have received internal injuries."

"I'd know it by this time," Dave laughed. "Marshmallow and I are both all right, though for the life of me I don't understand how we escaped. Mrs. Mallow nearly had heart failure, when she learned about the accident."

"I don't wonder. Kitty and I nearly went crazy, too!"

"Marshmallow's mother tried to put him to bed when he got home, but he balked."

"It's all a huge joke to you two," Doris chided severely, "but if you had been killed, it wouldn't have been so funny. Oh, sometimes I wish you'd give up aviation. It's so dangerous!"

Dave gazed down at her intently.

"Would you care—much—if I did get hurt?"

"Oh, don't ask such a question. Of course I would! Now you're just trying to tease me."

She changed the subject, refusing to permit Dave to draw any further admission from her. As they motored swiftly toward the camp she told him of her interview with McDermott.

"Well, I don't know how to advise you," Dave

said in perplexity. "I'm like you. I heartily dislike that bird and yet have no reason for it."

"He seemed honest enough today, although somehow I had a feeling that he wasn't entirely in sympathy with my claim for a share in the Estate."

"I don't like his asking for a fee right away."

"That's what I thought. Of course, I can raise the sum, but I want to be sure it's wisely spent."

"Maybe you can look around and find another lawyer."

"Possibly," Doris agreed doubtfully, "but I don't want to antagonize McDermott. He's in a position to make my way very difficult."

"That's so, too."

"It seems to me that I'll be practically forced to employ McDermott, Dave. Of course, the money will be well spent, if it results in bringing me the inheritance."

"That little word 'if' has been the stumbling block in many a deal," Dave observed pessimistically.

"I agree, but one has to take some chances. If I only could find someone who could prove that my Uncle John Trent really is dead, it would greatly simplify matters."

"But where can you find such a person?"

"That's what I don't know, but I have one glimmer of hope."

"What is that?"

"I am hoping that Mr. Jay may know something of him. He's lived in Cloudy Cove for years and years, you know."

Dave nodded soberly.

"It wouldn't do any harm to try him. He's a mysterious old fellow but very likeable."

"I believe I'll talk with him, just as soon as I get back."

Doris did not have an opportunity to interview the old miser until late that afternoon, for upon reaching the camp she found Mrs. Mallow and Kitty still excited over the recent airplane accident. They had told the story to nearly everyone in the camp, and neighbors besieged them for details. Dave and Marshmallow declared that they enjoyed being in the limelight.

"Everyone has had a narrow escape now, save me," Mrs. Mallow sighed. "I do all the worrying."

Doris wished to see Mr. Jay alone, but she was not able to slip away from the others until nearly supper time. Hurrying toward the cabin in the woods, she caught a glimpse of the miser down on the beach. He was standing on a high rock, looking out across the water at the brilliant sunset.

As Doris hurried up, Mr. Jay turned and smiled in a friendly manner.

"The custard you brought this morning was very good," he said. "Please thank Mrs. Mallow for me."

He turned to look at the sky again, apparently forgetting Doris's presence. She studied him silently for several minutes, wondering how she had better begin.

"Mr. Jay," she said hesitatingly, "there's something I want to ask you."

The old man reluctantly gave her his entire attention.

"You've lived here at Cloudy Cove for a great many years, haven't you?" Doris plunged on, wishing that Mr. Jay would make it easier for her.

"Yes," the miser answered. There was a long pause before he added, "a great many years."

"You must know nearly everyone around here, then. Tell me, did you ever hear of a man by the name of Trent? John Trent?"

Mr. Jay's eyes lifted quickly, but after the first quizzical glance directed at Doris, he merely shook his head in a bewildered way. He began to edge toward the path.

"Oh, don't go, please," Doris pleaded.

From the glance he had bestowed upon her she was convinced that Mr. Jay had heard of her uncle. She could not permit him to leave without making a desperate attempt to quiz him. Why was he always so unwilling to answer questions?

Reluctantly the miser halted, but he avoided Doris's penetrating eyes. He hung his head as though ashamed to face her.

"Think hard," Doris begged. "Have you ever heard of the name?"

"Sounds a bit familiar," Mr. Jay admitted, shuffling his feet and dislodging a small stone which fell over the side of the cliff into the cold water.

"Oh, it would mean so much to me if only you could remember where you heard the name!"

Doris could see that the old man was fighting a battle with himself, but just what was causing him such mental anguish she was at a loss to understand. Why had her questions disturbed him?

"It would mean—a lot to you—to know about John Trent?" Mr. Jay asked in a low voice, but one tense with suppressed emotion.

Doris nodded eagerly.

"I knew John Trent quite well," the miser admitted slowly. A grim smile flickered over his face for an instant. "He was my best friend!"

"Then surely you can tell me what became of him?"

There was another long pause and then Mr. Jay said briefly:

"He died. In a rooming house."

"You saw him at the last?"

"Well, no, I didn't."

"But you know beyond a doubt that he died?"

The miser nodded his head morosely.

"Yes, and mighty glad he was to go. He was tired of life—of everything."

Doris could scarcely restrain her excitement, for she felt that now it would be an easy matter to establish her claim to the fortune. She had never known her uncle, but as Mr. Jay's words made her realize that John Trent had been a very lonely and unhappy man, her pleasure at solving the enigma of his life was tempered with regret.

Doris felt that she must ask more.

"Mr. Jay," she questioned eagerly, "will you come with me to Frank McDermott's office and sign a statement to the effect that my uncle is no longer living?"

"Your uncle?" the miser gasped.

"Yes, I am Doris Force. Surely you knew."

"Force! Force!" Mr. Jay muttered. "The name wasn't mentioned. I would have noticed."

"I am John Trent's niece," Doris explained, studying the old man wonderingly. "I must have a signed statement in order to claim the property."

"Your name is Force, you say?"

"Yes, Mr. Jay. My father and mother are not living. I and my Uncle Wardell Force live with Mrs. Mallow."

"I see." Again the old man's gaze wandered, then came back to Doris's face.

"My mother's name was Trent before she married, and my Uncle John Trent was her brother."

The miser nodded.

"I have been told that he left some money, and

that part of it was to come to me. I need—need it very much."

"You need it—very much?" the man asked the excited girl, who stood before him with pleading eyes.

"Yes. So you see how important it is that someone who knew my uncle go to Mr. McDermott to sign a statement."

Doris could hardly wait for his answer.

Mr. Jay made no response, but stared at her incredulously.

Doris thought he did not believe her, so, recalling that at the moment she had in her pocket the photograph which Azalea and Iris Gates had given her, brought it out as proof of her story.

"See," she pointed out, "there is a signature on the back."

"Where—where did you get this photograph?"

Doris explained that the Misses Gates had given it to her, and briefly related the story of her encounter with Joe Jeffery. She observed that Mr. Jay listened intently, hanging upon her every word, but the color had faded from his face, leaving it almost ashen in hue.

"The Misses Gates are eager for me to settle up the Estate," she finished. "Now that I have told you everything, will you come with me?"

For answer, Mr. Jay shrank away, covering his face with his hands. A low cry which was not un-

like a sob wracked his body. He turned and fled toward the woods, muttering to himself. Doris started to follow him, as she was afraid from the zig-zag way he was walking, that the old man might fall.

She decided, however, not to. She merely stared blankly after him.

She had caught his last words: "Oh! This is killing me!"

This left her more mystified than ever.

CHAPTER XXIII

A GLIMMER OF LIGHT

Doris called after Mr. Jay, but he appeared not to hear her. Without glancing back, he staggered into the woods and was soon out of sight.

"Now, what in the world made him act like that?" Doris asked herself in perplexity. "I wonder if I said anything which offended him?"

She was still tempted to follow the miser, but again decided against it. As she made her way slowly back toward the camp, she was sorely troubled. She had hoped that he would agree to sign the paper which would give her an undisputed claim to the Trent fortune, but now it appeared that new difficulties stood in the way. For some reason, Mr. Jay was unwilling to tell what he knew concerning her uncle.

"Mr. Jay seemed very interested in my story," Doris thought. "When I spoke of the Misses Gates, his face lighted up. I wonder if he could have known them, too?"

Doris did not return immediately to the cabin for she wished to be alone; she desired to have an opportunity to think things out. Sitting down on a mossy log she reflected gravely, recalling every-

thing she knew about the miser. His strange utterance during his recent delirium now took on a special significance. What was it he had said? Something about a ring; then, too, he had mentioned "the Gates."

"Is it possible he could have meant Azalea or Iris?" Doris mused. "Or perhaps Locked Gates!"

Since coming to Cloudy Cove, she had been obsessed with the idea that she had seen Mr. Jay at some previous time. She recalled that he, too, had mentioned that her face seemed familiar. Yet obviously they had never met before. What was there about the old man that served to remind her of some other person? Who was it that she thought he resembled?

"My Uncle John Trent!" The name came like a flash to Doris. "Why didn't I think of it before?"

She took from her pocket the photograph which the Gates twins had given her, and scanned it hopefully. The picture had been taken many years before, when her uncle and the Misses Gates were young. At first glance there did not appear to be the slightest resemblance between the youth of the photograph and Mr. Jay, but the longer Doris studied the face, the more troubled she became.

"He has the same high forehead," she compared mentally. "He's about the same height, too, although Mr. Jay has acquired a stoop to his shoul-

ders. I declare! There's a marked resemblance! If Mr. Jay were slicked up, he would look the very picture of my uncle!"

The discovery excited Doris. While she could not bring herself to the point of believing that Mr. Jay and John Trent were the same man, yet there was a growing suspicion in her mind. Now that she had struck a clue, she was determined to run it to earth.

"I'll go to Mr. Jay again," she decided, "and plead with him to tell me everything."

She arose from the log and started back toward the old miser's cabin, but just at that moment Mrs. Mallow opened the door of their own cottage and called to them that supper was ready. Reluctantly Doris turned back.

"Oh, well, perhaps it will be wise to wait until after supper before trying to talk with him again," she assured herself. "He was upset when he left me. I'll give him an opportunity to get over it."

As soon as supper was finished, she explained to the others that she wished to talk with Mr. Jay on rather important business.

"Never mind the dishes," Kitty told her. "I'll do them alone."

"I'll help," Marshmallow offered. This was a great concession on his part, for if there was one thing more than another that he disliked, it was wiping dishes.

Dave had gone to the spring to refill the water pails, so Doris set off for the cabin by herself. She was rather glad that the others had not offered to accompany her, for she preferred to speak with the miser alone. She felt that he would be less self-conscious, more willing to tell her the things she wished to know.

A loud barking attracted her attention as she approached the cabin, causing her to quicken her steps. Coming within sight of the shack she was surprised to see that Mr. Jay's dog had been tied to the porch, a most unusual procedure, as the hound was usually permitted to wander freely about the camp.

"That's queer," Doris murmured, going over to the dog.

He gave a low whine at her approach, and she saw that he had nearly freed himself from the tether. Doris retied the rope, and after quieting the hound, moved toward the door. Again the dog set up a loud barking.

"What can be wrong?" she thought in some alarm. "That dog seems upset about something, and it isn't a bit like Mr. Jay to leave him tied up."

She knocked on the door. There was no response. After a long wait she was forced to the realization that Mr. Jay was not at home.

She started to leave, but halfway across the

porch looked thoughtfully at the dog and then turned back.

"Mr. Jay may be inside, too ill to open the door," Doris told herself. "Perhaps the dog is trying to make me understand."

After a slight hesitation she tried the door, and, finding it unlocked, pushed it gently open. Mr. Jay was not there.

Doris surveyed the room in astonishment. She saw at a glance that the miser had not eaten supper there, yet everything was in confusion. The books had been removed from the wall rack, papers were scattered about the floor, the desk was in disorder.

Yet the thing which struck Doris most forcibly was that Mr. Jay's suitcase, which he kept under the bed, was gone. Quickly she crossed the room and opened the closet. It was empty save for a torn shirt and a pair of dirty overalls.

"He's packed up and left!" she gasped in amazement. "Oh, why did he do that?"

Doris felt that the situation was one which called for wiser heads than hers. Leaving the cabin, she ran back to call Mrs. Mallow and the others. On their way to investigate, she told them all that she had learned that afternoon in her talk with the old man.

"I'm afraid I've driven him away," Doris cried, "though why he should be frightened, is more than

I can guess. Oh, dear, it's so disappointing! Just when I thought the mystery had been solved."

"We may be able to find him," Dave said encouragingly. "Have you searched the cabin for clues?"

"No, I didn't want to go through his desk."

"It seems to me it would be perfectly all right, considering the circumstances," Mrs. Mallow declared. "We must try to find Mr. Jay and bring him back. Unless we find some clue in the cabin, we will not have the slightest idea where to look for him."

"Maybe he hasn't skipped out, after all," Marshmallow commented. "He left his hound."

"Oh, I'm sure he doesn't intend to return," Doris insisted. "Otherwise, he wouldn't have taken all of his clothing. He knew we would find his dog and take good care of him."

As she spoke, she flung open the door and her friends beheld the disarray of the cabin. Doris crossed over to the desk and began to examine the scattered papers. She saw that nearly everything had been removed, but she hoped that in his haste to depart Mr. Jay had overlooked something of significance.

To her disappointment the few papers which remained in the pigeonholes were worthless. They were mostly advertising folders.

"I can't find a thing," she declared.

"Nothing here either," Kitty said. She had been looking through the drawer of the kitchen table. "Just a few scribbled notations on an old envelope."

"Let me see it!"

"It's worthless," Kitty insisted, handing it over. "Just a grocery list, I believe."

Doris took one look at the envelope and then gave a cry of pleasure.

"I'm sure this is written in Mr. Jay's own hand!"

"I suppose so," Kitty admitted, wondering what was so exciting about that.

Light dawned upon her, as Doris brought out the photograph of her uncle.

"The signature on the back!" she cried.

Doris turned the photograph over and compared the signature, which her uncle had scrawled there many years before, with the writing on the envelope.

"They look the same to me!" she exclaimed. "What do the rest of you think?"

The others had crowded about, eagerly studying the two specimens.

"Jumping gazelles!" Marshmallow exploded. "They *are* the same!"

"That is rather an unusual signature," Mrs. Mallow suggested. "Very fine."

"A bold handwriting," Dave commented. "The kind I like to see, too."

For a full minute the five stared at one another, unable to comprehend the full significance of the discovery. Doris was the first to recover from the shock.

"Do you understand what this means?" she demanded intently. "My Uncle John Trent *isn't* dead!"

"Then you haven't any fortune," Kitty murmured.

"Oh, what do I care about that, if my uncle is actually alive! I'm just as sure as anything that Mr. Jay is my uncle. How selfish he must have thought me, when I talked about the inheritance."

"No one could believe you were selfish," Dave interposed.

"Then why did Mr. Jay run away, when I tried to question him? I can't understand that."

"It's clear he didn't want his identity known," Mrs. Mallow said, "but why he should have hidden all these years is beyond me. He didn't do anything to be ashamed of, did he, Doris?"

"Nothing that I ever heard about. Of course, that affair with the Misses Gates must have troubled him considerably. Especially if he learned about the death of their father. I suppose if he were sensitive, he might have considered that he was indirectly responsible for the poor man's death."

"Mr. Gates had always been troubled with his

"WHERE—WHERE DID YOU GET THIS PHOTOGRAPH?"

Doris Force at Cloudy Cove *Page 183*

heart," Mrs. Mallow observed. "That quarrel they had wasn't really the cause of his death."

"No," Doris admitted, "but I imagine my uncle blamed himself for it. Of course, he felt he could never face the Gates twins again after refusing to say which one he loved the better."

"It's all a hopeless muddle," Kitty sighed.

The others were inclined to agree with her, but wanted to help Doris.

"Surely," argued Marshmallow, "something will turn up to straighten things out. Now that you know Mr. Jay is your uncle, and he is alive, it should be easy to find him."

"The trouble is," interposed Mrs. Mallow, "that you're not *sure*."

"If only we can find Mr. Jay, we may be able to straighten everything out!" Doris declared, her eyes sparkling with excitement.

"How can we find him, when we haven't any idea where he went?" Kitty demanded.

"He may have gone to Cloudy Cove. We'll get the car out and go there as quickly as we can!"

To think was to act with Doris, and she turned toward the door. She uttered a cry of astonishment, for there stood Ollie Weiser!

"I didn't hear your step on the porch!" she gasped, wondering how much of her affairs the man had overheard.

"Guess you folks were making too much racket

yourselves," the magician grinned. "Why all the excitement, anyway?"

"There isn't any," Dave retorted coldly, before Doris could answer.

"I thought I'd throw a little party tonight," Weiser announced, ignoring Dave's thrust. "I want to celebrate my victory over that bloated hotel-keeper, you know. How about it, folks? You're all invited."

"Really, we can't tonight," Doris said hastily. "We have some very important business which must be attended to at once."

She glanced suggestively toward the door, but the magician did not take the hint.

"Business," he repeated, smiling blandly. "That reminds me of something, Miss Force. How about that act of ours? Have you thought it over?"

Dave had endeavored to keep his temper in check, but now it seemed to him that the magician was insulting Doris. Angrily he pushed forward, jerking away from Marshmallow's restraining hand.

"Say!" he muttered, eyeing Weiser with undisguised dislike. "Get this straight, will you? Doris isn't going to have anything to do with any cheap two-for-a-quarter singing and dancing act! The sooner you get that through your head and clear out, the better we'll all like it!"

"You call my act cheap?" the magician demanded, standing his ground. "I'll show you

about that! Nobody can talk to me that way and get away with it."

He began to strip off his coat, and Dave, undaunted, followed his example. Marshmallow rushed forward and interposed himself between the two.

"Lay off!" he ordered. "Can't you see that you're ruining Doris's chance of finding her uncle? You and your silly quarrels make me sick!"

Abashed, Dave permitted himself to be hauled away from the battle line, but the magician continued to cast baleful glances upon him.

"Please don't quarrel," Doris begged. "Marshmallow is right. We must all work together or my trip to Cloudy Cove will have been in vain."

"I'm sorry," Dave muttered, extending his hand to Weiser. "It was my fault."

The magician hesitated, then accepted it, smiling broadly.

"No, it was mine. I guess I had my nerve blundering in here."

"Now don't start arguing about whose fault it is," Marshmallow interrupted brutally. "We must be on our way, or we'll never find Mr. Jay."

"Is that who you are after?" Ollie questioned in surprise.

"Yes," Doris informed him quickly, "but we don't know where he went. It's of the utmost importance that we find him at once."

"Why didn't you tell me what all the excitement was about?" the magician demanded. "I could have saved you all this mental anguish under which you are now laboring."

He struck a pose, enjoying to the full the attention which he commanded.

"As it happens, I saw your friend, Mr. Jay, not half an hour ago, but by this time I judge he is beyond your reach!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CHASE

"You saw Mr. Jay!" Doris exclaimed. "Where?"

"In Cloudy Cove," Ollie Weiser informed her. "He was standing at the corner waiting for the Thor Bay bus, or at least I suppose he was, for he had a suitcase in his hand."

"The Thor bus goes straight to the steamship dock, doesn't it?" Doris demanded tensely.

The magician assented, adding:

"There's a steamship leaving about this time, too. I think it's due to pull out about seven forty-five."

"What time is it now?" Doris asked.

"Seven-twenty," Dave responded, looking at his watch. "If Mr. Jay took that bus, we'll be too late to catch him. We can't get to the bay before the steamer leaves."

"We have twenty-five minutes!" Doris cried. "We must try to catch him!"

Still clutching the photograph and the bit of envelope, Doris ran from the cabin, followed by the others. Marshmallow had left his car standing in the open and the young people piled into it.

"Go on without me," Mrs. Mallow called, for

she had been unable to run as rapidly as the others. "Oh! I hope you make it in time!"

Marshmallow had taken the wheel, Doris and Dave crowding into the front seat beside him. Kitty and Ollie Weiser, not to be left behind, climbed into the back.

"I'll bet the pesky thing won't start," Marshmallow muttered as he stepped on the starter.

For a wonder it did. In spite of its age, the car still had considerable pep, and Marshmallow knew how to make it perform to the best advantage. The engine roared loudly, the fenders rattled, but, had the car boasted a speedometer, it would have disclosed the fact that the state speed law was being broken.

"Didn't think the old buggy had it in her!" Marshmallow exclaimed.

"Do be careful!" Kitty warned. "We don't want to land in the ditch!"

At times the car did waver in the road, but, as Marshmallow later boasted, he always managed to keep it between the fence posts. Anxiously, Doris watched the time.

"How far is it to the dock?" she questioned.

"Must be all of fifteen miles," Weiser told her.

"Then we'll never make it!"

In a few minutes they came within sight of the bay and followed it southward. The road was congested with motorists who were out for pleas-

ure, and Marshmallow was forced to reduce the speed.

"This settles it," he groaned. "Unless that boat is late in leaving the dock, we haven't a chance."

The steamship dock was located on the bay near the city of Ashlow. As they caught a glimpse of the lights, Doris looked again at her watch. It was twenty minutes to eight!

"Oh, Marshmallow," she pleaded, "can't you go a little faster? We have only five minutes."

"This is the best she'll do," Marshmallow returned grimly. "We're going so fast now, I'm afraid everything will fall to pieces."

Doris kept her eyes fastened on the dial of Dave's watch. Just as the car entered the outskirts of Ashlow, she sank back dispiritedly against the cushions.

"It's no use," she said quietly, trying to hide her disappointment. "The time is up."

"Maybe we can make it yet," Marshmallow insisted. "We haven't heard the steamship whistle."

Even as he spoke, a loud, mournful blast sounded from the direction of the dock.

"There she goes!" Dave exclaimed. "She's just pulling out!"

Doris was too disappointed to offer any comment. She felt that if Mr. Jay succeeded in getting away, she would never be able to locate

him again. The mystery would remain forever unsolved.

A few minutes later Marshmallow found the street leading to the waterfront, but by that time everyone had given up hope. As the car came within sight of the dock, Doris and her friends saw that the steamship was far out from land.

"Maybe we can rent a motorboat and overtake her," Ollie suggested.

"That's a mighty good idea," Dave approved, forgetting his bitterness toward the magician. He sprang from the car and helped the girls to alight.

The five raced to the waterfront, but could not find a motorboat in the vicinity. As they stood gazing hopelessly after the vanishing steamer, they were so discouraged and heartsick that they did not immediately notice the bus which was standing nearby. Kitty was the first to call attention to it.

"I'll question the driver and find out if a man answering Mr. Jay's description boarded the steamer," Doris said rather listlessly.

She crossed over to the bus, the others at her heels. In response to her question the driver smiled.

"I reckon that man was one of the passengers, all right, Miss, but he didn't get on the steamer. We had a breakdown on the road and didn't pull in here more than three or four minutes ahead of

your car. Most of the passengers are over there at the station waiting for the next boat."

"What a lucky break!" Dave exclaimed as they all hurried toward the station. "We'll surely find him now."

However, a search of the waiting passengers did not disclose Mr. Jay. At last Doris ventured to ask one of the men if he had seen the old miser.

"I think he took his baggage and went toward the city," the stranger informed her politely. "He seemed quite disturbed because he had missed his boat."

"We may catch him yet!" Doris declared, thanking the gentleman for the information.

They all hurried back to the car, but as Marshmallow started the motor, he looked inquiringly at Doris.

"I haven't much of an idea in which direction to go," she admitted in perplexity. "I suppose our best chance is to look for him in the main part of the city."

"He may have gone to a restaurant to get something to eat," Kitty suggested hopefully.

Five minutes later the car approached the main part of the city, and Marshmallow selected the most important business street. He drove slowly, permitting the others to scan the faces of the pedestrians.

"I'm afraid it's a hopeless task," Doris sighed,

"but as long as there is any chance of our finding him, we must keep searching."

There was a further delay, while gasoline was put into the car. As they drove on down the street, Dave said:

"Let's stop in front of this restaurant. I'll go inside and look around. It's possible he stopped here."

Marshmallow halted the car at the curb and Dave vanished inside the eating place. Through the plate-glass window the others could see him talking to the cashier.

"If we don't find Mr. Jay here, there's one thing we can do," Doris said thoughtfully, "and that is to camp by the dock. We can catch him when he comes to take the next boat."

"Yes, but he may be afraid someone will follow him and take a train or a bus out of the city," Marshmallow returned gloomily.

"We might separate," suggested Kitty, "and look at these different places."

Dave came out just then to report that no one answering Mr. Jay's description had been seen there. He climbed into the car and they drove on again, stopping at the next restaurant a block farther down the street.

"I'm afraid we're just wasting time," Doris commented, while they were waiting for Dave. "I think it's useless to—" She broke off suddenly.

Her attention had been attracted to a well-dressed, smooth-shaven man who had just at that moment stepped out of a barber shop which adjoined the restaurant. Doris was certain she had never seen him before, yet there was something strangely familiar about his appearance. It was not until he started down the street that she noted the peculiar walk and stoop to the shoulders.

"Look!" she cried tensely. "Isn't that Mr. Jay?"

"It is!" Kitty exclaimed. "He looks like a different person!"

Doris did not hesitate. Springing from the car, she ran after the man, indifferent to the stares of passersby.

"Wait!" she called.

The man turned his head, and as Doris looked squarely into his face she was certain that she was not mistaken. It was indeed Mr. Jay!

For an instant she thought that the old man intended to run away, for an expression of alarm and panic passed over his face. As he hesitated uncertainly, she rushed up to him.

"Oh, you mustn't run away!" she cried, catching him impulsively by the arm. "Come back to the car. I must talk with you, and we can't here, for people are staring."

"I—I'm in a hurry," the old miser protested. "I'm going away."

"I can't let you go. Not until I have explained everything. Then, if you insist upon leaving, I won't try to keep you."

By this time Doris's friends had gathered about the two, and Dave, returning from the restaurant, joined the group on the street. Mr. Jay looked from one to the other, as shamefaced as a culprit caught in a dishonorable act. As a matter of fact, he had been attempting to get away from Cloudy Cove without having his identity discovered. He had hoped that by changing his appearance, he could avoid detection.

Doris, seeing that the old man was not to be persuaded, determined upon a bold stroke.

"It's useless to pretend," she said gently. "I know that you are my Uncle John Trent!"

A frightened look came into the eyes of the miser. His wrinkled hands shook.

"You can't know," he murmured brokenly. "You can't know."

"But I do! I have positive proof." Doris brought out the photograph and pointed to the miser's signature on the back. "Here is my uncle's handwriting, and if you compare it with the writing on this old envelope, you will see that they are in the same hand!"

Mr. Jay stared hard at the photograph, and all at once his pose fell away. His shoulders drooped, his head sank low against his chest; he became, in

effect, a tired, beaten old man, long buffeted about by an unkind world.

For just a moment Doris thought that perhaps she had made a dreadful mistake—that probably she was doing an injustice to this man.

Almost at once, however, she reassured herself.

"Aren't you my uncle?" she pleaded.

"Yes, it's no use to pretend," he murmured in a voice scarcely audible, "I am John Trent!"

CHAPTER XXV

A SATISFACTORY SOLUTION

"Oh, I knew it! I knew it!" Doris cried. "After you ran away this afternoon I was just sure that you were my own uncle. Come with us to the car."

The old man shook his head and hung back. Doris saw a tear trickle down his cheek.

"No, I must go away. You don't understand—there are things I can't explain."

"You need not explain anything," Doris told him gently. "I understand everything. You must come with me back to Chilton and perhaps later to Locked Gates."

"Locked Gates," her uncle echoed hollowly.

Doris bit her lip at her own thoughtlessness, just when she was trying to be particularly tactful. How inconsiderate of her, she thought, to remind him of the very thing which had driven him away. Undoubtedly, John Trent knew as well as she, that the Misses Gates had locked the front entrance of their property following the unfortunate affair. In reality, the Locked Gates were a symbol—a reminder that the Gates twins had locked their hearts against their former lover.

"I can't go back—there," the old man murmured. "It is best that I fade completely out of sight. No one cares for me any more—"

"Why, Uncle John, we all love you and want you back," Doris assured him.

"But Azalea and Iris—"

"I feel sure they have forgiven you everything, although I can't believe it was your fault that things went wrong. You should never have gone away, Uncle John. You should have faced the situation."

The old man avoided Doris's eyes.

"I realize it now, but it's too late to rectify my mistake."

"But it isn't," Doris assured him firmly. "Please come with us."

John Trent made no response, yet when his niece took him gently by the arm, he went with her to the car. On the way back to the camp Doris and her friends wisely refrained from discussing the topic which was so painful to Doris's newly found relative. However, once he was comfortably established in Mrs. Mallow's sitting room he reverted of his own accord to the previous conversation.

"I've come to the conclusion that you are right, Doris," he said, speaking her name rather shyly. "I have been foolish all these years to hide away from the world."

"Then you will go back with us to Chilton?" his niece questioned eagerly.

Mr. Trent hesitated.

"I'll do anything you ask, Doris, but I'd rather wait about going back. I don't feel as though I could face things just yet."

"I understand," Doris said quietly, "and I won't urge you to, although we do so want you with us at Chilton. Whenever you are ready to come, you know we shall be waiting."

She had thought it best not to show her uncle the ruby ring which the Misses Gates had given her, for she was not certain how the sight of it would affect him. She longed to ask him whether the engagement ring had been intended for Azalea or Iris, but she hesitated to put the thought into the form of a question.

"There are a great many things I must explain," Mr. Trent said, appearing to read a part of what was in her mind. "It doesn't seem to me I can tell the story now, but perhaps later I can make you understand my side of the affair."

"Don't try to tell us anything now," Doris said, smiling kindly. "There will be plenty of time after you have joined us at Chilton."

She felt confident that her uncle would not run away again, and in this belief she was correct. As the reader will learn in the next volume of the series, John Trent was to keep his promise and re-

join his friends. Further adventures were to unite him with the Gates sisters, Azalea and Iris.

"What was it you were saying to me this afternoon about an inheritance?" Mr. Trent asked his niece, a twinkle in his eye.

"It's true I had designs on your fortune," Doris laughed, "but I'd much rather have an uncle than an inheritance."

"From what you told me I judge you need money," Mr. Trent persisted.

"Oh, I always need money. My music lessons take such a lot, and then of course I have to go to school. How fortunate it was I didn't give McDermott the amount he wanted."

"McDermott?" her uncle questioned.

"Yes, the lawyer who drew up your will. When I appealed to him for aid in settling up the Estate, he said it would be necessary to advance a fee."

"Why, the old scalawag! He must have been trying to cheat you!"

"Who is a scalawag?" a genial voice demanded at the door.

Everyone turned to see Mr. Baker beaming in upon them. He drew up a chair, for by this time he felt very well acquainted with his tenants. Doris explained that they were speaking of the lawyer.

"McDermott has a reputation for shady deals,"

Mr. Baker informed them, "but this is the first time anyone ever caught him in anything."

"We haven't really caught him yet," Doris observed.

"Perhaps not, but you know enough to make it very unpleasant for him. If I were you, I'd let on you know more about him than you do."

"What would you advise?"

"Why not call him on the telephone? Pretend that you have proof he has handled your uncle's affairs dishonestly. Let me see, didn't you tell me that crook, Joe Jeffery, was in league with someone here in Cloudy Cove?"

"Your memory is unusually good tonight," Doris smiled.

"I guess I can still remember a few things. Well, I have it! Tell McDermott you have proof that he and Joe Jeffery were scheming to get your uncle's property."

"It would only be a bluff."

"Of course. But you never can tell how McDermott will take it. Why not try?"

"All right, I will," Doris announced with sudden determination. "I'll telephone his house this minute."

She went to the telephone and after a brief wait was connected with the lawyer. She had not dared hope that her accusations would be considered seriously, yet more to humor Mr. Baker

than for any other reason, she linked Joe Jeffery's name with that of McDermott. There was a long silence at the other end of the wire and then a cold voice hissed:

"It's a lie! I never saw Joe Jeffery in my life, let alone having had anything to do with him!"

Before Doris could respond, the click of a receiver told her that McDermott had hung up.

"Oh, well, it was only a random shot," Mr. Baker said, when she repeated the conversation.

"He did seem dreadfully disturbed, especially when I mentioned Jeffery."

"Why not drop around and confront him in his office tomorrow morning?" Dave asked.

The others agreed that the suggestion was an excellent one, so it was decided that they would all go together to McDermott's office early the following day. John Trent declared that he, too, would accompany Doris, for he wished to have a private talk with the lawyer.

As the hour was late, Mr. Baker said goodnight and left for Cloudy Cove, accompanied by Ollie Weiser. A little later John Trent took his departure, after promising to come back to the cabin for breakfast.

"You don't think there's any danger he'll try to run away again?" Kitty asked anxiously, after the old man had left.

"I'm sure he'll keep his promise," Doris said.

"You know, I thought tonight he seemed happier than he has since we came here."

"Yes, he did, Doris. And what a difference clothes make! Why, he's quite handsome!"

"I hope I'm not going to have a rival," Marshmallow, who had heard the last remark, broke in. "We don't want to have another Weiser-Chamberlin affair to deal with."

"Say, lay off, will you?" Dave growled. "That fellow was a real help tonight, so I'm willing to let bygones be bygones."

The young men went to their own cabin next door, still bantering good-naturedly. Doris and Kitty retired at once, but, instead of sleeping, they lay awake discussing all that had happened.

"Such a night!" Doris sighed blissfully. "And to think I've acquired another uncle!"

"He's crazy about you, Dory. You can tell by the way he looks at you."

"I like him a lot, too, Kitty. He's had such an unhappy life. I hope I can make it up to him in some way. You know, I didn't dare tell him about the ruby ring, because I was afraid he'd feel hurt if he knew the twins had given it away."

"There will be plenty of time later on," Kitty assured her. "Aren't you just dying to learn why he hid the ring under the rose bush, and which one of the twins he really loved?"

"That's only the start of what I want to know,"

Doris confessed just before she fell asleep. "If we're only patient, I think we shall find out, for Uncle John has promised he will tell the entire story."

Early the next morning Doris and her friends, including Mr. Baker and John Trent, hurried to Frank McDermott's office, there to demand an explanation of his actions. To their surprise they found the place in disarray and the stenographer was just putting on her wraps to leave.

"The office is closed," she announced in response to Doris's inquiry. "Mr. McDermott left town late last night and said he wouldn't be back."

"Skipped out!" Dave exclaimed.

"He didn't pay two weeks' wages that he owed me," the stenographer informed them. "I'll probably never get my money now."

She went out, leaving Doris and the others staring blankly after her.

"Let's take a look at the inside office," Mr. Baker suggested.

A casual glance disclosed that the room had been hurriedly vacated. The desk had been cleaned out and papers were scattered over the floor.

"It looks to me as though that bluff of ours was pretty effective," Mr. Baker commented dryly. "Like as not he was trying to get Mr. Trent's property."

In this guess Mr. Baker was correct. Frank

McDermott had been involved in many unscrupulous dealings, and it had seemed an easy matter to him to steal the contents of John Trent's safe deposit box. With Joe Jeffery he had concocted the plot against the Misses Gates, revealed in the first volume of the series, but the news of Jeffery's imprisonment made him uneasy. When Doris accused him of having had a part in the affair, he jumped to the conclusion that his former pal had confessed everything. He had hastily gathered his possessions together and fled.

"I wonder if the rascal got away with my money?" John Trent asked with a troubled frown. "If he did, I'll track him down, if it's the last thing I do!"

A visit to the bank disclosed that the safe deposit box had not been touched. In his haste to depart, McDermott had not dared to wait until the bank opened in the morning.

Doris's vacation at Cloudy Cove was nearly ended, but the few days which remained were most pleasantly spent. The young people swam, played tennis, golfed and fished. Doris spent a great deal of time in the company of her uncle and the two became close friends. John Trent lost his self-conscious manner and became almost jovial. He spent money freely, taking his niece and her friends to many shows and entertainments.

"Imagine calling him a miser!" Kitty laughed.

"Why, he's the most generous man I ever knew."

At last the day of their departure arrived. Doris and Kitty packed their things, said goodbye to their Cloudy Cove acquaintances, and prepared to entrain for Chilton. Mrs. Mallow was to accompany them, while Dave and Marshmallow planned to spend one more day in Cloudy Cove before starting for home.

Together with John Trent they went to the station to bid Mrs. Mallow and the girls goodbye.

"It certainly has been an exciting vacation," Kitty declared, as they stood waiting for the train. "I'll remember it all my life."

"So shall I," Mr. Trent smiled, looking at Doris.

Quietly he slipped something into her hand. She gazed down in surprise, as she saw that it was a hundred-dollar bill.

"For your music," her uncle said. "Just a little token of my appreciation."

Doris tried to protest, but Mr. Trent refused to listen. As the train rumbled into the station, she thanked him for the gift and kissed him goodbye.

"Do I get one, too?" Dave demanded impudently.

"Please drive carefully going back to Chilton," Mrs. Mallow warned her son.

Marshmallow was squeezing Kitty's hand, and did not hear her.

Little did these adventurous young people know what exciting times awaited them as they were obliged to go West soon after their arrival home, as related in the next volume entitled, "Doris Force at Raven Rock; Or, Uncovering the Secret Oil Well."

As soon as the girls had taken seats in the train, they raised a window.

"You're certainly a real detective, Doris," Marshmallow grinned as the train began to move slowly. "There's another job waiting for you when you get back to Chilton."

"What's that?" Doris called.

"Finding the man who sold me that stolen car!"

—THE END—

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